HISTORY OF ISLAM IV

VOLUME 4

Islamic Cultures and Societies to the End
of the Eighteenth Century

Edited by
ROBERT IRWIN

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Cambridge

UNIVERSITY PRESS

THE NEW CAMBRIDGE HISTORY OF

ISLAM

VOLUME 4

Islamic Cultures and Societies to the End of the
Eighteenth Century

Robert Irwin's authoritative introduction to the fourth volume of
The New Cambridge History of Islam offers a panoramic vision of
Islamic culture from its origins to around 1800. The chapter, which
highlights key developments and introduces some of Islam's most
famous protagonists, paves the way for an extraordinarily varied
collection of essays. The themes treated include religion and law,
conversion, Islam's relationship with the natural world, gover
nance and politics, caliphs and kings, philosophy, science, medi
cine, language, art, architecture, literature, music and even
cookery. What emerges from this rich collection, written by an

international team of experts, is the diversity and dynamism of the
societies which created this flourishing civilisation. Volume 4 of
The New Cambridge History of Islam serves as a thematic companion
to the three preceding, politically oriented volumes, and in cover
age extends across the pre modern Islamic world.

Robert Irwin is senior research associate of the history depart
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His previous publications include For lust of knowing: The Orientalists
and their enemies (2006), Night and horses and the desert: An anthology
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(i994)-

THE NEW CAMBRIDGE HISTORY OF

ISLAM

The New Cambridge History of Islam offers a comprehensive history
of Islamic civilisation, tracing its development from its beginnings
in seventh century Arabia to its wide and varied presence in the
globalised world of today. Under the leadership of the Prophet
Muhammad the Muslim community coalesced from a scattered,
desert population and, following his death, emerged from Arabia
to conquer an empire which, by the early eighth century, stretched
from India in the east to Spain in the west. By the eighteenth
century, despite political fragmentation, the Muslim world
extended from West Africa to South East Asia. Today Muslims
are also found in significant numbers in Europe and the Americas,
and make up about one fifth of the world's population.

To reflect this geographical distribution and the cultural, social
and religious diversity of the peoples of the Muslim world, The
New Cambridge History of Islam is divided into six volumes. Four
cover historical developments, and two are devoted to themes that
cut across geographical and chronological divisions themes
ranging from social, political and economic relations to the arts,
literature and learning. Each volume begins with a panoramic
introduction setting the scene for the ensuing chapters and exam
ining relationships with adjacent civilisations. Two of the vol
umes one historical, the other thematic are dedicated to the
developments of the last two centuries, and show how Muslims,
united for so many years in their allegiance to an overarching and

distinct tradition, have sought to come to terms with the emer
gence of Western hegemony and the transition to modernity.

The time is right for this new synthesis reflecting developments
in scholarship over the last generation. The New Cambridge History
of Islam is an ambitious enterprise directed and written by a team
combining established authorities and innovative younger schol
ars. It will be the standard reference for students, scholars and all
those with enquiring minds for years to come.

General editor

MICHAEL COOK, CLASS OF 1943 UNIVERSITY PROFESSOR
OF NEAR EASTERN STUDIES, PRINCETON UNIVERSITY

VOLUME I

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Sixth to Eleventh Centuries

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VOLUME 2

The Western Islamic World
Eleventh to Eighteenth Centuries

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VOLUME 5

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EDITED BY FRANCIS ROBINSON

VOLUME 6

Muslims and Modernity
Culture and Society since 1800

EDITED BY ROBERT W. HEFNER

Contents

ROBERT IRWIN

Contents

Contents

Figures

Illustrations

Illustrations

Dynastic tables

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List of contributors

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List of contributors

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Note on transliteration

The transliteration of Arabic and Persian words is based on the conventions
used by the Encyclopaedia of Islam, second edition, with the following mod
ifications. For the Arabic letter jim,j is used (not dj). For the Arabic letter qaf, q
is used (not fe). Digraphs such as th, dh, kh and sh are not underlined.

Words and terms in other languages are transliterated by chapter contrib
utors according to systems which are standard for those languages.

Place names, many of which are familiar, appear either in widely
accepted
Anglicised versions (e.g. Cairo), or in most cases without diacritical
points
(e.g. Baghdad, not Baghdad).

Abbreviations

AI

BAR

BGA

BSOAS

DLB-.ALC

EAL

Eh

IJMES

ILS

JAOS

JESHO

JNES

JRAS

JSAI

SI

ZDMG

ZGAIW

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International Journal of Middle East Studies

Islamic Law and Society

Journal of the American Oriental Society

Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient

Journal of Near Eastern Studies

Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society

Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam

Studia Islamica

Zeitschrift der Deutschen Morgenldndischen Gesellschaft

Zeitschrift fur Geschichte der Arabisch Islamischen

Wissenschaften

1200 IgOO 24Q0 km

Estentof the Islamic world atthe
death of Muhammad 632
Estentof the Islamic world atthe
death of 'Uthman S56
Estentof the Islamic world atthe
end of the Uinayyad dynasty 750
Limit of "the Islamic world at the end
of the Uraayyad dynasty 750

Estentof the Islamic world 1210

■^ Limit of the Islamic worid 1250
Estentof the Islamic world 1500

Area reconquered by Christians 1250

Area reconquered by Christians 1500

Extent of Christian crusading principalities in twelfth century

Site and date of important hattle

s^~ ^Dema.k a

Introduction

ROBERT IRWIN

The miniature Humay and Humdyun in a garden was painted in the bright
colours of the world when it was younger. It was produced in Herat around
833/1430 by an anonymous artist, and it is most likely that it was originally
bound in an anthology of verse and pictures. The depiction of a night scene
was rare in Islamic art. It is curious to note that artists in western Europe were
similarly experimenting with night scenes some decades later. In the frescoes
in San Francesco of Arezzo, painted in the 1450s, Piero della Francesca showed
Constantine asleep in his tent at night and, later in the same century, a French
illuminated manuscript of Le livre du cueur d 'amours espris featured three even
more remarkable nocturnes. However, whereas the Western artists con
cerned themselves with the realistic registration of the fall of candlelight and
shadow, as well as the muting of colours and the disappearance of detail in
nocturnal obscurity, the Persian miniaturist presents us with a night scene in
which we (and apparently the figures in the miniature) have perfect night
vision. Instead of trying to reproduce the real world, the artist was using
conventionalised images of people, plants, trees, lamps and architecture in
order to fill the picture plane in a decorative and, indeed, ravishing way.

Although a painting of this kind is therefore not a window on the world
in the ordinary sense, nevertheless study of such a work tells us a great deal
about the culture that produced it. The painting, which celebrates an aristo
cratic way of life and sensibility, was aimed at an aristocratic clientele. (Hardly
anything that can be called popular art survives from this period.) There had
long been an Arab literary and visual cult of the garden in the Islamic world.

Medieval visitors to the Alhambra in Granada were at least as impressed by
the gardens as they were by the palace; and rawdiyyat, or poetry devoted to
gardens, was a recognised genre of Arabic poetry. If anything, the cult of the
garden intensified in the Turco Persian culture of the late medieval and early
modern period. Persian painters depicted the garden as an earthly paradise
and the privileged dwelling place of princes. Depictions of battles and

enthronements were certainly not unknown, but artists usually preferred to
celebrate the world of an idle and tranquil aristocracy among whom a code of
decorum concealed any passions that may have been felt. Poetry competed
with the Qur'an as a guide to conduct. The culture of the aristocracies of
ninth/fifteenth century Herat, Samarqand, Istanbul, Cairo and Granada was
highly literary, and the arts of the book were correspondingly highly valued.
The range of calligraphies displayed in Humay and Humayun would have been
as impressive to the cognoscenti as the representation of the figures in the
garden. As for the style of the painting, it is unmistakably Persian and, as such,
has evolved from the earlier (Byzantine influenced) Arab tradition of the art of
the book. Nevertheless, there are also a number of stylistic features that derive
from Chinese art. No history of the culture of this period can afford to neglect
the massive influence of China on the visual arts, economy and technology
of the Islamic world. Finally, the anthology form, for which this sort of
painting was produced, was a leading feature of Islamic culture. Some of the

greatest figures in the literary world, such as Abu al Faraj al Isfahan! or Ibn

[Abd Rabbih, were famous not for what they composed themselves but for

their diligent compilations of other men's flowers. Such anthologies had the

effect of canonising and prolonging the cultural conventions and sensibilities

of past centuries.

Although Humay and Humayun in a garden is unmistakably a work of Islamic

art, it is extremely difficult to articulate why it is classified as such. The subject

matter is not obviously religious (though the poem by Khwaju al Kirmanl that

it illustrated was an allegory of the soul's quest for God disguised as a princely

romance). 1 Moreover, the depiction of human figures might be deemed to be

in violation of the Qur'an' s ban on the fashioning of images. It is also difficult

to identify what, if anything, it has in common with the literary and plastic

creations of the Islamic world in the first century of its existence (the frescoes

found in Umayyad desert palaces, for example). 'Islamic art' is a term of convenience, although a potentially misleading one. 'Islamic art' or 'Islamic

literature' or 'Islamic science' and, above all, 'Islamic civilisation' could even

be held to be merely labels for all the stuff produced in the areas dominated by

Muslim rulers or populations. However, there is more to it than that, for

i On this painting and its literary subject matter, see Teresa Fitzherbert, 'Khwaju Kirmanl

(689 753/1290 1352): An eminence grise of fourteenth century Persian painting', Iran, 29

(1991); Thomas W. Lenz and Glen D. Lowry (eds.), Timur and the princely vision: Persian

art and culture in the fifteenth century (Washington, 1989), pp. 117, 236; Eleanor Sims, Boris

Marshak and Ernst Grube, Peerless images: Persian painting and its sources (New Haven and

London, 2002), pp. 82 3.

Introduction

'Islamic civilisation' is a shorthand term for quite a different set of realities.
Ludwig Wittgenstein, when he came in Phibsophical investigations to confront
the problem of how to define 'game', denied that there was any single
feature that games had in common. Instead 'we see a complicated network
of similarities overlapping and criss crossing: sometimes overall similarities,
sometimes similarities of detail'. Wittgenstein went on to characterise these
similarities as 'family resemblances' and to argue that 'games' formed a
'family'. 2 In much the same way, there has not been one Islamic civilisation,
but many different Islamic civilisations at various times and in various places.
These Islamic civilisations have various features in common and constitute a
'family'. Some of the things many of these civilisations shared derived from
the religion that they had in common, but this was not always the case. Thus,
although the employment of slaves in the army and the higher ranks of
the administration was a fairly pervasive feature of Islamic societies, there
is nothing strictly Islamic about it; the employment of such slaves (mamluks or
ghulams) does not derive from any injunctions in the Qur'an. Similarly,
although the qasida form of verse is common to all the Islamic literatures,
there is nothing specifically religious about it and the same point can be
made about the proliferation of the arabesque and muqarnas in the artistic
vocabulary of the Islamic lands from Andalusia to Sumatra. Much of what we
recognise as forming part of Islamic culture derived from local cultures and
past non Islamic histories, rather than being something that was imposed by
Arab Muslim conquerors.

Some sources of belief and behaviour in the Muslim world

To return to Herat, in the ninth/fifteenth century this city was one of the
leading centres of a high culture that was Sunm Muslim and Persianate in most
of its leading features. It is important to bear in mind that prior to the sixteenth
century Iran was overwhelmingly Sunni Muslim, while ShTism was largely
restricted to certain remote regions of Lebanon, eastern Turkey and Yemen.
While Turks and Circassians tended to predominate in the political and
military elites of the Islamic heartlands, the style of their culture was Persian
(notwithstanding the saying, popular in the Arab world, 'He who learns
Persian loses half his religion'). Several of the Ottoman sultans wrote poetry
in Persian. The Mamluk sultan of Egypt and Syria, Qansawh al Ghawri knew
Persian, and he commissioned a translation of Firdawsi's Shahnama into
Turkish so that those of his amirs who only knew Turkish could see what

2 Ludwig Wittgenstein, Philosophical investigations (Oxford, 1953), pp. 31 4.

The New Cambridge History of Islam

they were missing. 3 In Herat the poet and minister of state 'Ali Shir Nawa^
more or less single handedly set about creating a Chaghatay Turkish literature
that was based on Persian models. In the visual arts what has come to be
known as the International Timurid style (which was characterised above all by
floral chinoiserie motifs) prevailed in Ottoman Turkey, Mughal India and the
territories in between. Merinid Morocco and Nasrid Andalusia were relatively
untouched by this Persianate culture. Even so, it has been suggested that
certain features of the palaces of the Alhambra their polychrome, muqamas
and chaharbagh type gardens derive ultimately from Persian prototypes.

In the ninth /fifteenth century Islamic science had reached an unprecedented
level of sophistication. (Muslim innovations in mathematics, astronomy and
the other exact sciences did not come to an end in the sixth/ twelfth century
when Europeans stopped translating Arabic treatises on the subject.) Many of
the most important advances, for example work on geometric solutions for
quadratic equations by c Umar al Khayyam (d. 526/1131) and on plane and
spherical trigonometry by Nasir al Din al Tusi (d. 672/1273^, were made in
the eastern Islamic lands. Astronomy enjoyed a cult status under the Timurids
(as it had earlier under the Ilkhanids of Iran and the Rasulid sultans of Yemen).
Ulugh Beg, the Timurid ruler of Transoxania and Khurasan in the years
850 3/1447 9, presided over a team of astronomers and mathematicians of
whom the most prominent was al Kashi (d. 832/1429), who worked on decimal
fractions and the approximation of pi, among much else. It would take
European mathematicians another two centuries to arrive at the discoveries
that had already been made by Ulugh Beg's team in Samarqand.

Despite the efflorescence of a courtly Persianate culture, older Arabic
genres and conventions fed into that culture. The Arabic verse form the qaslda
or ode, which had been first developed in pre Islamic Arabia, was taken up by
Persian poets (and eventually also by poets writing in Hebrew, Turkish, Urdu,
Swahili and other languages). The ideal types of the nadim (the cultured cup
companion) and the zarif (the refined dandy), though first codified in the
'Abbasid period, still provided models of conduct for courtiers and literati
throughout the Islamic world. Arabic also remained the chief medium of
scholarship, and religious topics in particular were studied and debated
in Arabic. Arabic encyclopaedias and other compendia provided the
Islamic world with an enormous common pool of knowledge. In 833/1429

3 Esin Atil, Renaissance of Islam: Art of the Mamluks (Washington, 1981), pp. 264 5; Esin Atil,

'Mamluk painting in the late fifteenth century', Muqamas, 2 (1984); Doris Behrens
Abouseif, 'Sultan al Ghawii and the arts', Mamluk Studies Review, 6 (2002), p. 77.

Introduction

Shah Rukh, the Timurid ruler of Khurasan, sent an embassy to Egypt to request that the Mamluk sultan Barsbay send him a copy of the commentary
on al Bukharl's Sahlh (a collection of sayings of the Prophet) by the renowned
Egyptian scholar Ibn Hajar, as well as the Kitab alsuluk, a chronicle by the
hardly less famous historian al Maqrizi. The fame (or in some cases notoriety)
of Muslim scholars could span continents. In the eighth /fourteenth and ninth/ fifteenth centuries the suspect orthodoxy of the seventh /thirteenth century Andalusian Sufi Ibn al 'Arab! (who was accused of monism among
other things) was debated not just in Andalusia and North Africa, but also in
Egypt, Yemen and Khurasan, and later also in eleventh/ seventeenth century
Java. 4 (Sufi adherents of the doctrines of Ibn al 'Arab! had a leading role as
missionaries in South East Asia.) The cohesion of the Muslim communities
was strengthened by the common practice of pious scholars of travelling in
order to listen to and memorise hadiths (orally transmitted reports of the sayings of the Prophet and his Companions) from as wide a range of authorities as possible. Sufis also travelled widely, and travel features prom
inendy in the formative part of the careers of such prominent Sufis as al Hallaj, al Ghazali and Ibn al 'Arab! The shared code of law (the shaft d) and
curriculum of higher education throughout the Muslim world made it relatively easy for scholars, statesmen and others to find employment in lands distant from their place of birth. Ibn Battuta, Ibn Khaldun and Ibn Arabshah were among the many famous Muslims who did so. The case of Ibn Battuta is particularly striking. In the early eighth/fourteenth century he

travelled everywhere in the Muslim world from Mali to the Maldives and,
wherever he went, he encountered urban institutions that he was already
familiar with from his youth in Tangiers, including the mosque, the
hammam,
the madrasa (teaching college) and the suq (market). Moreover, his path
criss
crossed with those of other roaming Muslim traders, scholars and job
seekers.
Besides the scholars and the Sufis, many ordinary Muslims went on the
hajj
(and in Spain and North Africa in particular the practice gave rise to the
literary
genre of the rihla, a narrative of the pilgrimage). The hajj and the
consequent
mingling of peoples from all over the world at Mecca and Medina
facilitated
the exchange of ideas and information. Most Muslims went on the hajj in
order to fulfil a religious duty, but a few seem to have done so in order to
find
brides, and many others made use of the commercial opportunities
afforded
by their pilgrimage. The economic prosperity of Damascus, in particular,
was

4 Alexander D. Rnysh, Ibn 'Arabt in the later Islamic tradition: Tfie
making of a polemical image
in medieval Islam (Albany, 1999).

The New Cambridge History of Islam

dependent on the success of the hajj. The coming together and dispersal
of
Muslims on the hajj had the effect of spreading information about
religious
and cultural developments throughout the Islamic world. Moreover,
Islam
was the language of trade throughout the greater part of the known
world.
This was particularly the case in the Indian Ocean and across the
landmass of

Asia. Because of this, many Chinese, who wished to establish themselves in
international commerce, found it advantageous to convert to Islam. The
family of styles and techniques that has come to be known as 'Islamic art'
owed much of its continuing evolution to the transmission, via international
commerce, of designs on textiles and ceramics made for long distance export.

Muslims were the heirs to a set of overlapping and competing legendary,
semi legendary and historical versions of the past. Firdawsts Persian verse
epic the Shahnama (written in the early fifth/ eleventh century) combined the
legends of pre Islamic Iran to produce a celebration of Iranian identity. His
saga also offered reflections on the rights and duties of princes, as well as
models for princes, most notably a (fancifully Iranicised) Emperor Alexander.
Fantasies about Alexander and his tutor Aristotle also figured largely in the
Arabic literary version of Classical Antiquity in which the Greek sages
appeared in Muslim garb. The legacy of Pythagoras, Aristotle, Plato and
later authors of romances was evident in such things as the vast body of
alchemical and related literature conventionally ascribed to the ninth century
alchemist Jabir ibn Hayyan, as well the Rasa'il, a tenth century encyclopaedia
put together by the Brethren of Purity in Basra. Ibn STna (d. 428/1037) and Ibn
Rushd (d. 595/1198) provided what were largely rational commentaries and
elaborations on the philosophy of Aristotle, but the genuine legacy of Aristotle
competed with that of the much more popular bogus Aristotle, who was
supposed to have written the Sirr al asrar (Secret of secrets), a rather chaotic
compendium in the mirrors for princes genre, with a great deal of additional
material of an occult or folkloristic nature. A rather different aspect of the
Greek legacy was also evident in the popular Arabic genre of stories of lovers
parted and reunited which followed the conventions of late Hellenistic
romances. Islamic art and architecture, like Byzantine architecture, was heir
to the visual culture of the Hellenistic world. The quintessentially Islamic
arabesque evolved from the earlier Greek deployment of vine leaf motifs in

decoration. The arabesque, together with the Corinthian capitals of the columns in the Umayyad palace of Madinat al Zahra' outside Cordoba and
the classical images on twelfth century Artuqid coinage all attested in their
different ways to the continued vitality of the visual legacy of Classical Antiquity.

Introduction

The poetry of the jahili or pre Islamic poets in the Arabian Peninsula and stories about the context of the composition of that poetry constituted a third sort of quasi legendary prehistory with which the cultured Muslim was supposed to be familiar. Arab jahili values, such as sabr (patience) and
muruwwa (manliness), continued to be adopted and espoused by much later
sultans and warlords, including the famous Saladin. The extraordinarily high
status of poetry, the backward looking nature of most of that poetry and the
esteem in which the poetic genres offakhr (boasting) and hijcC (satire) were
held were all part of the jahili heritage that survived under Islam. Yet a fourth
type of past was anonymously manufactured in later centuries in the form
of the Turkish and Arab popular epic, celebrating the exploits of historical
or legendary figures, including 'Antar, Sayyid Battal and the Mamluk sultan
al Zahir Baybars among many others. (It is worth noting that popular epics
tended to place as much stress on the value of cunning as on military prowess
and derring do.) 5 Again, from the seventh/thirteenth century onwards, after
the Mongols had established an empire that stretched from China to the Euphrates, the traditional practices of Chinggis Khan and his Mongols con
stituted yet another code of conduct (one can think of it as the Chinggisid sunna) for many in Iran, Khurasan and elsewhere who nevertheless chose to

describe themselves as Muslims.

Ideals of Islam and their implementation

All these various 'histories' offered potential role models and ideals of
life.
However, by far the most important ideal of life was that provided by the
Prophet Muhammad and members of his immediate family. The life story
of
the Prophet and accounts of the preaching of Islam and early Islamic con
quests constituted the core history that gave the Islamic community its
identity, and this history was transmitted and authenticated by the
religious
scholars, the 'ulama\

The semi legendary and secular versions of the Muslim world's pre
history
and history had to be reconciled with or refuted by the orthodox version
of

On these epics and the role of the cunning man in them see in particular
Malcolm Lyons,
The Arabian epic: Heroic and oral story telling, 3 vols. (Cambridge,
1995).
David O. Morgan, 'The great Yasa of Chingiz Khan and Mongol law in the
Ilkhanate',
BSOAS, 49 (1986); Robert Irwin, 'What the partridge told the eagle: A
neglected Arabic
source on Chengiz Khan and the early history of the Mongols', in Reuven
Amitai Preiss
and David O. Morgan (eds.), The Mongol empire and its legacy (Leiden,
1999); R. D.
McChesney, Central Asia: Foundations of change, Leon B. Poullada
Memorial Lecture
Series (Princeton, 1996), pp. 122 3, 127 41.

The New Cambridge History of Islam

Islamic history, and the ideals of life of pious Muslims. The orthodox
version
was based on the Qur'an, hadith and the sua (biography of the Prophet).

Islam's history and the religious sciences, orally transmitted from generation
to generation, played the leading role in sustaining Islamic norms. Such
Islamic norms constituted the surma, both law and code of conduct, as
established by precedent. However, it should be remembered that substantial
Shi'ite communities did not accept this surma. The Shi'a tended to transmit
different traditions, many of which referred back to the chain of imams, who
were members of the Prophet's family by descent from Muhammad and 'All,
the Prophet's cousin. Moreover, Shi'a tended to place greater stress on the
power to interpret those traditions by mujtahids, scholarly religious authorities
who were deemed to be able to exercise independent judgement in these
matters. Shi'a also tended to place less emphasis on consensus than the Sunnis
did, and esoteric texts and secret doctrines loomed larger in their heritage.
All the same, despite the Sunni stress on the transmission of traditions in
providing a basis for both a Muslim society and a virtuous life at the individual
level, the Sunni tradition was something that had to be elaborated, rather than
merely inherited. Its evolution, like that of Shi'ism, was shaped to a large
degree by the demands and expectations of the peoples that the Muslims
conquered. Religious codes were slowly elaborated to answer any of the
questions that might be raised about conduct or belief and, to some extent,
rival Sunni and Shi'ite communities established their identities by defining
their beliefs and practices in opposition to one another. Moreover, within
Sunnism itself, as the leading madhhabs (law schools) developed in rivalry to
one another, a similar process of self definition occurred. 7

The Hanbali madhhab, which tended to take particularly rigorous positions
on points of Islamic law and conduct, played a leading role in defeating a
school of thought known as Mu'tazilism. Mu'tazilism, in a narrow sense,
refers to the doctrine that the Qur'an was created, as opposed to coexisting
eternally in time with God. In practice, the term referred to a wider body of
vaguely secularist and rationalist opinion. The 'Abbasid caliph al Ma'mun
(r. 198 218/813 33) adopted the createdness of the Qur'an as official doctrine,

and he persecuted Hanbali opponents of the Mu'tazila. He also presided over a translation and scientific research programme centred on his library

7 On the formation of a Sunni identity see, among much else, Patricia Crone and Martin
Hinds, God's caliph: Religious authority in the first centuries of Islam (Cambridge, 1986);
Richard W. Bulliet, Islam: The view from rfte edge (New York, 1994); Christopher Melchert,
The formation of the Sunni schools of law, 9th 10th centuries CE (Leiden, 1997).

Introduction

in Baghdad known as the Bayt al Hikma (House of Wisdom). 8 By the 240s /850s Mu'tazilism was no longer in favour at court and the Mu'tazila were suffering persecution. The Bayt al Hikma declined into obscurity around the same time. However, the full fruits of the early ninth century intellectual debate and translation activity (much of it from Greek) only became fully apparent in the tenth and eleventh centuries, by which time the Abbasid caliphate was not much more than a political fiction.

The period from approximately 340/950 to 440/1050 was arguably the golden age of Islamic Arab intellectual culture (as well as of Persians writing
in Arabic). The thinkers and writers of first rank who flourished in this period
included the historian and belletrist al Mas'udI (c. 283 345 1 c. 896 956), the poet
al Mutanabbi (c. 303 54/c. 915 65), the philosopher Ibn Sma (d. 428/1037), the
scientist Ibn al Haytham (d. c. 431/1039), the scientist, historian and geographer
al Blruni (362 c. 442/973 c. 1050), the jurist and political thinker al Mawardi
(364 450/974 1058), the poet al Ma'arri (363 449/973 1058) and the belletrist
and heresiographer Ibn Hazm (384 456/994 1064). It was also during this period that the somewhat mysterious Brethren of Purity (Ikhwan al Safa')

compiled their encyclopedia of all the sciences. Furthermore, the beginnings of
high Islamic culture in the Persian language can be dated to this period, with
the composition of the Shahnama by Firdawsi (d. c. 411/1020). The explosion of
knowledge and debate in this period owed something to the increased use of
paper. This had a role in sustaining not just literature, but also commerce,
technology and art. During this period philosophy, as well as many forms of
freethinking and outright defences of hedonism, flourished. Esoteric ideas
added to the ferment, and the fourth /eleventh century has been characterised
as that of a revolution manquee when Isma'ilis seemed to be in a position to take
over the heartlands of Islam, though in the event they were unable to convert
their hopes into reality. 9 In the long run, the entry of Turkish tribesmen in
large numbers into the heartlands and the enlistment of those Turks in the
Sunni cause, as well as the Sunni institution of the madrasa, played crucial roles
in reversing the tide of Shfite fortunes.

In Cairo the Fatimid caliph al Hakim (r. 386 411/996 1021), the head of the
Shfite Isma'ili regime, had founded the Dar al 'Ilm (House of Knowledge).

8 L. E. Goodman, 'The translation of Greek materials into Arabic', in M. J. L. Young,
J. D. Latham and R. B. Serjeant (eds.), The Cambridge history of Arabic literature, vol. Ill:
Religion, learning and science in tfie 'Abbasid period (Cambridge, 1990), pp. 477 gj; Dmitri
Gutas, Greek thought, Arabic culture: The Graeco Arabic translation movement in Baghdad
and early 'Abbasid society (2nd 4th/Sth 10th centuries) (London, 1998).

9 Bernard Lewis, Tfie Arabs in history, 3rd edn (London, 1956), p. 139.

According to the fifteenth century Egyptian historian al Maqrlzl people from
all walks of life visited the House; some came to read books, others to copy
them, and yet others to study'. However, the House of Knowledge was not a
centre for the disinterested dissemination of knowledge; it also served as a
centre for Isma'ili indoctrination and propaganda. This was an age when
institutions of higher education were set up in order to serve competing
religious ideologies. The madrasa, or teaching college, which specialised in
teaching the SunnI religious sciences, originated in third/tenth century
Khurasan. The institution of the madrasa had the effect of consolidating the
position of the four chief madhhabs, or schools of SunnI religious law (ShafiT,
Hanbali, Hanafi and MalikI). The institution also facilitated the channelling of
patronage from the politicians and wealthy merchants to religious scholars. As
the institution of the madrasa spread westwards, it was used in sixth/twelfth
century Syria by the Zangid princes to combat ShTism. Later, after Saladin
overthrew the Fatimid caliphate in Egypt and established his own rule, the
foundation of madrasas in Egypt played a crucial role in the SunnI intellectual
recolonisation of Egypt. Thereafter political ShTism was on the defensive in
Egypt, Syria, Iran and elsewhere, and would remain so until the triumph of
the Shi'ite Safavid movement in Iran at the end of the ninth/fifteenth century.
The Umayyad caliphate of Cordoba, which had been fighting a losing
struggle against the Christian reconquista, was overthrown by rebel soldiers
in 1031. Though its demise and the departure of past magnificence were
repetitiously mourned in verse and prose, the breakup of the caliphate
preceded the culturally fertile rivalries of the ta'ifa ('party') dynasties, which
divided up what was left of the territory of Muslim Spain. Just as Umayyad

Cordoba had sought to recreate in the west the lost glories of Umayyad
Damascus, so the ta'ifa kings, through literary and artistic patronage, sought
to recreate the lost glories of the Cordoban caliphate (and later, in the four
teenth and fifteenth centuries, the Nasrid kingdom of Granada would have
similarly nostalgic aspirations). In Syria and Egypt under the Ayyubids and
Mamluks, the period from the end of the twelfth century to the opening of the
sixteenth proved to be a golden age for SunnI 'ulama' culture. Much of that
culture took the form of vast encyclopaedias, literary anthologies and histories
that were largely compiled from the works of earlier chroniclers. From the
mid thirteenth century onwards cultural life in these lands was enriched by
the presence of refugees who had fled west to escape the Mongol occupation
of Iran and Iraq. Ibn Taymiyya, the rigorist Hanbali jurist and polemicist, and
Ibn Daniyal, the author of pornographic scripts for shadow plays, provide
contrasting examples of such refugees. More generally, as Ibn Khaldun,

Introduction

writing around 803/1400 was to note, Cairo and its numerous madrasas and
Sufi foundations proved a magnet for wandering scholars in search of patron
age. He was one of them himself. The c ulflma J were the main recipients of the
literary and intellectual patronage dispensed by the Kurdish, Turkish and
Circassian politico military elite. 10

Self-sufficiency and stagnation

From approximately the sixth/thirteenth century until the end of the twelfth/
eighteenth, the governing and military elite in much of the heartlands of the

Islamic world drew heavily upon specially educated men who were of slave
origin. Thus the Mamluk regime regularly renewed itself with military slaves
recruited from the Russian steppes and the Caucasus; the Ottoman sultans
relied on prisoners of war, as well as those who had been press ganged by the
devsirme (a levy of young men imposed on Christian villages); and the Safavid
shahs were served by elite slaves who were mostly of Georgian, Circassian or
Armenian origin. These slave elites were not just the audience for cultural
products, dispensing patronage and constituting an educated readership. They
were often themselves the originators of culture. The Mamluk historian
Baybars al Mansuri and the Janissary engineer and architect Sinan may serve
as examples.

There was an unmistakable decline in the vitality and productivity of
c ulama' culture in Egypt and Syria after the Ottoman conquest in 92.2./1316L
(even though the region seems to have benefited economically from the
increased security provided by Ottoman garrisons and policing). Selim the
Grim, the conqueror of the Mamluk lands, rounded up leading scholars and
Sufis, as well as artists and artisans, and sent them to Istanbul. From the tenth/
sixteenth century onwards Istanbul and cities to the east in Safavid Iran and
Mughal India were the high centres of Muslim civilisation. In India syncretistic
and pantheistic versions of Sufism flourished (much of it influenced by Ibn al
'Arab!). Those kinds of Sufism were usually looked on with favour by the
Mughal court, and they facilitated Muslim coexistence with the Hindu
majority. However, Shaykh Ahmad Sirhindi (d. 1034/1624), a Naqshbandi
Sufi, spearheaded a reaction against what he perceived as lax and potentially
heterodox forms of Islam. The mujaddidi (revivalist) form of Islam pioneered
by Sirhindi and those Naqshbandis who followed him was to exercise an
enormous influence not just in Muslim India but throughout the Islamic
world, particularly in the twelfth/ eighteenth and thirteenth/nineteenth

10 Robert Irwin, 'Mamluk literature', Mamluk Studies Review, 7 (2003).

centuries." In Iran the triumph of the Shi'ite Safavid movement was followed
by the persecution of traditional forms of Sufism. However, a great deal of
traditional Sufi thinking (of Ibn al 'Arabi and others) was included in the newer style of philosophical and gnostic mysticism (Hrfan), of which Mir Damad and Mulla Sadra were the leading figures in the eleventh/seventeenth
century.

Elsewhere, however, the international networks of the great Sufi orders were now exercising unprecedented influence at all levels of society.
The Naqshbandi order, for example, attracted adherents in India, Inner Asia, South East Asia, the Caucasus and the Middle East. Naqshbandis had
previously been prominent at the Timurid courts of Samarqand and Bukhara.
Naqshbandi missionaries went out to convert the Kazakhs to Islam in the ninth/ sixteenth century, and were also active in Malaya and Java.
Naqshbandis were also prominent in the cultural formation of the Ottoman
elite, where they competed for influence with members of the Mevlevi Sufi
order. Naqshbandi teachings also had a role in the development of fundamen
talist Wahhabi doctrine in the Arabian Peninsula. 11 Other orders, among them
the Chishus, the Kubrawis and the Shadhilis, played a hardly less notable role
in the continuing evolution of the civilisations of Islam. Sufism's success on the
edges of the Muslim world in areas such as Central Asia and South East Asia
may have been due in part to the readiness of some Sufis to make accom
modations with cultic beliefs and practices that derived from Shamanism, Hinduism, Buddhism and other local faiths. Islam at its fringes was not hard
edged.

In the late tenth/ seventeenth century Jean Chardin, a French jeweller who
visited Shah c Abbas II's Isfahan to trade, classified Persian trades and crafts
according to whether what was produced was superior or inferior to that
produced in Europe. It is striking that the list of manufactured items in which
the Persians excelled is a long one, while the list of crafts in which the Persians
lagged behind Europe is quite short. Chardin admired Persian textiles,
ceramics, wirework, metalwork in general, tanning, wood turning, gunsmith
ing, firework manufacture, stone cutting, dyeing, barbering and tailoring. He

ii On Indian Sufism and on reform movements see Richard Maxwell Eaton, The Sufis of
Bijapur yoo 1700: Social roles of Sufis in medieval India (Princeton, 1982); Francis Robinson,
The 'ulama of Farangi Mahall and Islamic culture in South Asia (Delhi, 2001); Francis
Robinson, 'Islam and Muslim society in South Asia', in Francis Robinson, Islam and
Muslim society in South Asia (New Delhi, 2000).

12 K. A. Nizami, 'The Naqshabandiyyah order', in Seyyed Hossein Nasr (ed.), Islamic
spirituality: Manifestations (London, 1991).

Introduction

did not think much of their glass, paper, trunks, bookbinding or goldsmith
ing. 13 Until approximately the second half of the eighteenth century Islamic
commerce and technology was not crucially dependent on relations with
Europe. The seaborne commerce of the Indian Ocean and the Red Sea was
dominated not by the fleets of the East India Company and similar European

enterprises, but by Indian Muslim shipping. Most of the Ottoman empire's long distance commerce was still conducted within its own frontiers. It has been estimated that, even as late as the end of the twelfth/ eighteenth century, only 14.6 per cent of the Ottoman province of Egypt's trade was with Europe, whereas more than twice that was with lands to the east.

The striking economic self sufficiency of the Islamic world was mirrored by the heartland's cultural self sufficiency. When Antoine Galland, in his preface to the Bibliotheque orientale (1697), asked himself why oriental peoples (partic ularly Arabs, Persians and Turks) took so little interest in Western literature, his answer was that their own literature was so rich that they felt no need to explore beyond it. Although this literature was rich, it is worth noting how much of what was being read, recited, copied and debated had either been produced centuries before or, at the very least, was cast in the retrospective mode. Islamic cultures remained largely shaped by their awareness of the past, as Muslim analyses of the present or blueprints for the future were remarkably rare (though there is an interesting body of literature produced by Ottoman statesmen and intellectuals analysing what they perceived to be the causes of the empire's decay). 14 It is hard probably impossible to point to historians of the first rank who wrote in Arabic in between the Algerian al Maqqari (c. 986 1041/c. 1577 1632) and the Egyptian aljabarti (1167 1241/ 1753 1825). All the same, it is clear from the number and provenance of manuscripts of chronicles surviving from the intervening period that there was widening taste for reading history. The readership was no longer drawn overwhelm ingly from princes, state servants and the 'ulama'.

The return to the past was one of the factors behind the impetus for reform that swept through the Islamic lands from the twelfth/ eighteenth century

onwards though of course that sense of need for reform was given extra urgency by the appearance of the British in India and then the French in Egypt.

13 Jean Chardin, Voyages du Chevalier Chardin en Perse et autres lieux d'Orient, ed. L. Langles
(Paris, 1811), vol. IV, pp. 88 187 (chaps. 17, 'Des arts mecaniques et metiers', and 18, 'Des
manufactures').

14 Bernard Lewis, 'Ottoman observers of Ottoman decline', Islamic Studies, 1 (1962); repr.
in Bernard Lewis, Islam in history: Ideas, people and events in the Middle East, 2nd edn
(Chicago and La Salle, IL, 1993).

13

For most reformers, reform meant not the embrace of some cloudy future,
but rather the return to the practices of early Islam. The blueprint for an ideal
society had been spelt out in fantastic detail in the lives of the Prophet and the
imams, and in the bemusingly numerous hadiths transmitted by communities
of Muslim scholars across the centuries. Reform then meant shedding past
accretions and rooting out abuses rather than devising innovations. Some of
the impetus for this sort of return to what were held to be the earliest and best
practices came from reformed Sufi groups especially Naqshbandis, especially
in India. Shah Wall Allah of Delhi (d. 1176 / 1762), preaching in the tradition of
Sirhindi, taught that only a return to strict conformity to the sharfa could

arrest the political decline of Islam in India and elsewhere. But Hanbali rigorists also played a role in Muslim revivalism. From the 1150s /1740s onwards Wahhabi fundamentalists fought to impose a purer form of Islam
on the Arabian Peninsula. In the nineteenth century similar movements would spring up in Africa, South East Asia and on the frontiers of China. In
the twelfth/ eighteenth century Bukhara, Khiva, Delhi and Timbuktu were at
least as important centres of religious thought and revival as Cairo and Istanbul.

Just as it is hard to trace the descent of ninth/ fifteenth century Persian painting from works produced in the first century of Islam, it is also hard to
find much in common between Qajar paintings of the late twelfth/ eighteenth
century and the Timurid miniatures from which they descend. It is evident
from comparing the two sorts of work that there has been a vast shift in sensibility and taste. During the intervening Safavid period, the Shahnama and
Persian epic poetry more generally had ceased to dominate the literary and
visual culture in quite the way they had done formerly. Genre and portraiture
had replaced the stock medieval scenes. Moreover, the change in sensibility
(not to mention technologies) is quite unmistakable. The palette has dark ened. Books illustrated with miniatures are now relatively rare. In Iran life size
painting on canvas or wood has become the fashion. Where once the artist
struggled to assimilate Chinese elements, now many of his visual ideas come ultimately from Europe. Artists now sought to produce real portraits
of sitters rather than to paint idealised moon faced types. They also rendered
light and shadow more realistically. However, only an imperceptive fool would mistake a Qajar (or a Mughal) painting for a work of Western art and, most often, those 'Western' influences came not directly from the West,
but were filtered via Indian Mughal art. Mughal and Qajar painters took what
they wanted from the West. Like any culture, the Islamic cultural framework
made some things possible and others impossible. It filtered and reinterpreted

14

i. The Persian prince Humay meeting the Chinese princess Humayun in a garden, c. 1450,
Islamic School. Musee des Arts Decoratifs, Paris, France /Giraudon/ The Bridgeman Art Library

The New Cambridge History of Islam

what it had received from the Hellenistic, Chinese and Turco Mongol cultures.

The Islamic world in 1800 was still in all sorts of ways effectively self sufficient. However, it would be perverse to ignore the fact that, by 1800, its various cultures and economies were weak in relation to those of the West and vulnerable to penetration by it. The problems included a widespread reluctance among the Muslims to innovate, and the preferred recourse to the sacred past for solutions. There were also perhaps certain weaknesses in civil society, including the absence of a developed Widerstandrecht (a formulated right of resistance to unjust authority). Muslim commerce suffered from a lack of access to the Americas, as well as from long standing problems arising from the shortage of such natural resources as wood, copper and coal in the heartlands of Islam. Al JabartI, the witness of French triumphs in Egypt in the 1210S/1790S, affected to be amused by their technology, and judged that

their balloons were mere toys for children. Yet at the same time it is clear that

he was more fascinated by French ways of doing things than he dared to admit. After witnessing scientific experiments conducted by Bonaparte's savants he declared: 'These are things which minds like ours cannot compre

hend.' 15 In Egypt and elsewhere self sufficiency was giving way to self doubt.

15 'Abd al Rahman al JabartI, 'Aja'ib al athdr fi'l tarajim wa'l akhbar, 3 vols. (Bulaq, 1297/

1878 80), vol. Ill, pp. 32, 36; ed. and trans. Thomas Philipp and Guido Schwald as 'Abd

al Rahman aljabartl's history of Egypt, 3 vols. (Stuttgart, 1994) vol. Ill, pp. 51, 57.

16

PART I

RELIGION AND LAW

:i

Islam

JONATHAN BERKEY

Islam, like any major religion, is a complex phenomenon. Diverse, at times
even contradictory, it resists summary and categorical description. The reli
gion was born among the inhabitants of the Arabian Peninsula in the early
seventh century CE. Yet Islam as we know it is the product of many peoples
and cultures: the Arabs, but also converts from among the Jewish, Christian
and Zoroastrian communities of the Near East. By 1800 Islam had expanded
into south eastern Europe, central, south and South East Asia, and sub
Saharan Africa. Indeed, Islam formed what many have called the first global
civilisation. Its ecumenical reach finds inspiration in a famous verse from the
Qur] an: 'Thus we have appointed you a middle nation, that you may be
witnesses to mankind' (Q 2:143). As a historical matter, however, Islam is best
understood as an expression of the larger tradition of Near Eastern monothe
ism. It is distinct from its older cousins, Judaism and Christianity, but its
origins and early development owe much to them.

The historical relationship of Islam and Christianity is especially fraught.
From the beginning, Muslims were aware of Christianity. Several of their core
beliefs were constructed as a response to or reaction against Christian doc
trine. The Muslim state took shape in the context of an existential struggle
against the Byzantine empire, which understood itself to be the defender of
the Church. Over the ensuing centuries the competition between Christianity
and Islam took ever sharper forms. In the Middle East, at least, most of
those who eventually converted to Islam did so from Christianity, a fact that
underlies the intense competition between the two religions. The competition
only worsened, and grew more violent, with the rise of the Crusading move
ment in the late fifth/ eleventh and sixth/ twelfth centuries. Despite all this,
there is much that binds the two religious traditions together. Both Muslims
and Christians worship the God of Abraham who created the world and gave

it purpose. For all that they differ, the Muslim and Christian traditions share
much more in the way of belief and practice than either one does with any of

the other major religious traditions Hinduism, say, or Buddhism. And for all
that they have found themselves locked in conflict over the last millennium
and a half, both Christianity and Islam arguably constitute twin foundations of
a single civilisation. 1

At least until recently, Islam's relationship with Judaism was less highly
charged than that with Christianity. Fewer Jews than Christians lived in those
lands Islam inherited, and with few (but important) early exceptions Jews did
not pose a political threat to the Muslim state. In terms of doctrine and
practice, Judaism and Islam are even more closely related than either one is
to Christianity. Both, for example, insist upon the radical oneness of God, and
reject the Trinitarian speculations of Christian theology. Both Islam and
Judaism have developed broad and comprehensive systems of laws, laws
which regulate believers' behaviour, especially in the domestic and commer
cial spheres, and which, far more than is the case with Christianity, define their
adherents' religious identities. Religious authority in the fully developed
Islamic tradition came to reside in a class of religious scholars (the c ulama')
who resemble the Jewish rabbinate far more than the Christian clergy. Muslim
roots in Jewish belief and practice go back to the very beginning. Suggestions

by some Western historians that, for several generations, Islam in fact con
stituted a Judaising movement rather than a distinct religion have not been
widely accepted, but the controversy sparked by this argument has high
lighted the close early ties between the two traditions. 2

Islam in Arabia

Islam begins with a religious message preached by a man named Muhammad
ibn 'Abd Allah in Mecca, in the western part of the Arabian Peninsula known
as the Hijaz, in the early years of the seventh century of the Common Era. The
religious milieu into which Muhammad was born some time around the year
570 is somewhat obscure, in part because we have almost nothing in the way
of direct literary evidence from the period and place in question. Later Muslim
narratives describe the Arabs as worshipping numerous deities, including the
three so called 'daughters of Allah' whose worship was prominent in Mecca.
As that appellation suggests, the creator God Allah was also known to the
Arabs Muhammad's own father bore the name of Abd Allah, or 'servant of
Allah' although he did not figure prominently in the Meccans' worship.

1 Richard Bulliet, The case for Islamo Christian civilization (New York, 2004).

2 Michael Cook and Patricia Crone, Hagarism: The making of the Islamic world (Cambridge, 1977).

Islam

More importantly, both Judaism and Christianity had reached the Arabian
Peninsula in the centuries before the coming of Islam. (Other Near Eastern

religions such as Zoroastrianism and Manichaeism may have been known there as well, although the evidence for their presence is more attenuated.)

Christianity had probably been introduced by missionaries from several churches, including Monophysites from Ethiopia and Nestorians from Iraq, as well as representatives of the Orthodox Church affiliated with the Byzantine state. There are some suggestions that the association of Christianity with the Byzantine empire limited its appeal to the pre Islamic

Arabs, who resisted efforts by external powers to extend their political author

ity over the Peninsula. There are also suggestions that Christianity was known

to the Arabs in somewhat garbled form: the Qur'an, for instance, at one point

seems to suggest that the Trinity is composed of God, Jesus and his mother

Mary (Q 5:116). Judaism was probably better known by and more firmly established among its adherents in the region, whether they were the descend

ants of Jews who had fled persecution by the Romans or native Arabs who had

embraced the Jewish faith. There is no sign of an organised Jewish presence

among the Arabs of Mecca, but half or more of the population of the nearby

agricultural community of Yathrib were Jews. More generally, the Arabs were

familiar with tales of the prophets and other biblical figures: they had some

how absorbed, that is, the narrative foundations of Near Eastern monotheism,

although not always in a form directly dependent on the accounts known in

the Jewish and Christian scriptures. The Qur'an itself makes this clear by alluding to biblical figures without always providing the full narratives iden

tifying them by assuming, in other words, that its audience already knew their stories.

Muhammad began to call his fellow Arabs to the worship of a single true God as a result of a transforming spiritual encounter. Around the age of forty,

he first began to hear a voice which called him to (in the words of what was

probably the very first revelation): 'Recite! In the name of your Lord who created created mankind from a clot of blood.' Over the next two decades Muhammad continued to receive these revelations sometimes at unexpected moments, sometimes in response to particular crises. After

Muhammad's death, the verses he had been commanded to recite were collected by his followers and assembled as the qur'an (lit. 'the recitation')
we have today. The revelations identified Muhammad as a prophet in line with those who had come before to the Jews and Christians. He is a 'prophet'
(nabi, lit. a 'warner' or 'spokesman'; cf Heb. navi), a 'clear warner' (nadhir
mublri), a 'bearer of good news' (bashir), and above all a 'messenger' (rasul)

The New Cambridge History of Islam

bringing a new law to his people. A story told by the later Muslim tradition
reflects its understanding of Muhammad's connection to the earlier 'proph
ets' to Abraham, Moses, Jesus and the rest. In this tale, a pious Christian living in Mecca who had 'read the scriptures and learned from those that followed the Torah and the Gospel' reassured the frightened Muhammad that
the words he was hearing were authentic revelations from God, and that he
was indeed 'the prophet of this people', the Arabs. 3 Indeed, at first there was
little sense that the revelations demanded the establishment of a new religion.
The worshipper of Allah was simply a mu'min, a 'believer'. Muhammad, in other words, saw himself as restoring the worship of the one true God: he saw himself as a prophet operating within the tradition of Near Eastern monotheism.

The central religious message of the Qur'an concerns God. God is por trayed in the Qur'an in transcendent terms reminiscent of Jewish and Christian
belief. He is 'the Lord of the worlds' (Q 1:2), 'the light of the heavens and the
earth' (Q 24:35), who created the world through the simple statement of his
will: 'Be!' (Q 6:73). He is the 'owner of the Day of Judgement' (Q 1:4), that
inescapable day 'when the heavens are split apart, and the planets are dis

persed, and the oceans are poured out, and the graves are overturned, and a
soul will learn what it has sent ahead and what it has held back' (Q 82:1 5), that
day when all humans will be called to account for their actions. God is the
judge, but he is also 'merciful' and 'compassionate', cares deeply for his creation and 'accepts repentance from his servants' (Q 42:25). Above all, he
is alone: 'Allah! There is no god but he, the living, the eternal' (Q 2:255), to
whom belong 'the last and the first' (Q 92:13).

For several years Muhammad preached this message to a small group of followers in Mecca. Eventually the radical monotheism of the Qur'anic revelations forced a confrontation with the dominant social group there, the
merchants belonging to the tribe of Quraysh, to which Muhammad himself
belonged and whose members enjoyed a kind of aristocratic status in the surrounding region. They worried that the worship of Allah to which Muhammad called the Arabs would undermine the cults associated with the
Ka c ba, the ancient shrine in Mecca which Quraysh controlled. These cults
drew worshippers from all over Arabia, and the commercial fairs associated
with them formed the foundation of Quraysh's wealth. The confrontation grew worse, and finally Muhammad and his followers were forced to flee, an

3 Ibn Ishaq, Svrat rasul attah, trans. Alfred Guillaume as The life of Muhammad (Oxford, 1955),
p. 107.

Islam

event known as the hijra. They sought refuge in the oasis settlement of Yathrib, where Muhammad may have hoped that the Jews would recognise
him as a prophet of God.

This event would prove critical to the future trajectory of the new religion
that would emerge from Muhammad's revelations indeed, it is from the
hijra, and not the birth of Muhammad or the beginning of the revelations, that
Muslims date their calendar. In Yathrib (or Medina, as it came to be known,
for madinat al nabi, 'city of the Prophet') Muhammad was both spiritual leader
and the dominant political figure. His political authority was never absolute.
In pre Islamic Arabia there was no tradition of standing government, and in
some ways Muhammad functioned as little more than the temporary leader of
a grand confederation of Arab tribes. The tradition preserves a document
actually a collection of several distinct agreements between Muhammad
and the various tribes and social groups living in Yathrib known as
the 'Constitution of Medina'. The document identifies Muhammad as the
'apostle of God', but describes his political role principally as a simple arbiter
of disputes. 4 Nonetheless, from the moment of the hijra Islam expressed
itself both as what we would call a 'religion' and as a political authority
that is, as a 'state'. As later Muslims would put it, al islam dawla wa din: 'Islam
is both a state and a religion'. This fact is fundamental both to the character of
the emerging Islamic tradition and to much of its subsequent tension with
both Christianity and Judaism. The relationship of both post exilic Judaism
and early Christianity to political authority was more contingent: in Judaism
because there were few Jewish states after the suppression of the Maccabean
kingdom; in Christianity because the new religion grew up in opposition to
the Roman empire for its first three centuries. In Islam a certain tension would
ultimately develop between religious and political authority, as we shall see.
But they were two sides of the same coin; more precisely, legitimate political
authority was always construed in explicitly religious terms. And that was a
consequence of the establishment in Medina of a political community (umma)
headed by a man who also claimed to be the messenger of God.

Another consequence of the hijra and the establishment of the umma was that the Islamic tradition began to take firmer and fuller shape. There has been
considerable controversy of late about this that is, about the moment at which 'Islam' became a distinct religion, one which its adherents understood
to be different from, and in competition with, the older Near Eastern mono
theisms. The controversy revolves around the degree to which Muslim

4 Ibid., pp. 232 3.

23

The New Cambridge History of Islam

literary accounts of Muslim origins, which date at the earliest to a period a
century or more after the events they describe, can be trusted. 5 There were
certainly many things about 'Islam' as it came to be known in later centuries
that were missing from the stage in this formative period. Nonetheless, taken
at face value, the Qur'an and the dominant Muslim narratives of Islamic origins provide evidence of a religious community that, during the decade
that Muhammad lived at Medina, came to see itself as distinct, a community
not just of 'believers' but of Muslims.

Several of the fundamental cultic aspects of Muslim religious life now took
clearer form, chief among them prayer (salat). The Qur'an consistently speaks
of prayer as the fundamental act of worship in Islam. The word islam means
submission, and prayer is the ritual act by which a believer expresses his acknowledgement of God and of God's sovereignty. A very early revelation

enjoined Muhammad to 'pray to your Lord' (Q 108:2). Prayer was not new:
Abraham, Moses and many others appearing in the Qur'an all worshipped God through prayer. But a distinctively Muslim form of prayer began to emerge. The precise guidelines that Muslims now follow in their ritual prayer for example, the requirement that Muslims pray at five specified times each day probably crystallised slightly later, in the century or so after
Muhammad's death, but their essential elements were already in place during the Prophet's lifetime. The Qur'an states that 'prayer is enjoined on the believers at fixed times' (Q 4.103), although it is a little imprecise as
to what those times are. Prayer as described in the Qur'an involved ritual purification, the glorification of God, prostration of the worshipper, reciting
God's word all components of the ritual salat now universally practised among Muslims.

Prayer was an act of individual submission, but also a collective experience.
According to one famous story, the Prophet stated that the prayer of an individual in a group was worth twenty five prayers of a solitary man. When the body of Muslims assembled, the Prophet himself normally served
as imam, or prayer leader. Already in Muhammad's day the community was
called to prayer through a public pronouncement. The Muslim tradition records that Muhammad at first considered the use of a horn or wooden clappers to summon the faithful, in imitation of, respectively, Jewish and eastern Christian practice, but that shortly after the hijra he settled on a verbal

5 For a brief survey of the problem see Jonathan P. Berkey, The formation of Islam: Religion
and society in the Near East, 600 1800 (Cambridge, 2003), pp. 57 60.

6 al Bukhari, Sahth, 'Kitab al adhan', bah 30, 31.

24

call to prayer shouted out from the roof of a mosque. 7 This development was
symptomatic of the emergence of a distinctive Islamic tradition. More decisive
was the contemporaneous shifting of the qibla, the direction faced by the
assembled worshippers. At first, and for about eighteen months after the hijra,
Muhammad and his Companions faced the holy city of Jerusalem when they
prayed. But then the Qur'an intervened to show them a new path: 'We shall
turn you to a qibla you prefer. So turn your face to the sacred mosque [i.e. the
Ka'ba in Mecca].' The Qur'an spelled out precisely the larger implications of
this shift: 'And even if you brought every sign to those who have [previously]
been given the scripture, they would not follow your qibla, nor should you
follow their qibla' (Q 2:144 5).

A similar transformation revalorised the practice of fasting. Fasting was a
common element in the Near Eastern religious traditions, and some pre
Islamic Arabs may have embraced it as an act of piety. Muhammad insisted
that his followers should fast, at first apparently with the Jews on the day of
'Ashura', the tenth day of the month of Muharram, which corresponded with
the Jewish Day of Atonement. But then, in the second year of the hijra, a
revelation again provided new guidance. Now Muhammad's followers were
instructed to fast during the month of Ramadan, 'in which the Qur'an was
revealed as a guide for the people'. During this month they were allowed to
'eat and drink, until the white thread is distinguished for you from the black
thread at dawn' (Q 2:185, 187). Here too the evolving Muslim practice was
grounded in, but increasingly distinct from, that of the earlier monotheistic
communities.

The differentiation of Islam from the other Near Eastern religions was
paralleled by another development: the growing mistrust of the Jews and

Christians expressed in the Qur'an. The Muslim holy book conveys mixed
messages concerning those known as the 'people of scripture', those com
munities that had previously received revelations from God. Those earlier
revelations were certainly genuine. 'We have revealed the Torah, in which is
guidance and light', says the Qur'an, and 'after them [i.e. the Jews], we sent
Jesus son of Mary, confirming the previous [scripture], the Torah, and we gave
him the Gospel, in which is guidance and light' (Q 5:44, 46). All revelation, in
fact, is God's: 'Say: We believe in God, and what is revealed to us and what
was revealed to Abraham and Ishmael and Isaac and Jacob and the Tribes, and
that which Moses and Jesus received, and what the prophets received from
their Lord. We do not distinguish between them, and we have surrendered to

7 Ibn Ishaq, Life of Muhammad, pp. 235 6.

25

The New Cambridge History of Islam

Him' (Q 2:136). At several places the Qur'an indicates that Jews and Christians,
or at least some of them, continue to stand in God's favour. 'Those who
believe, and the Jews and the Christians and the Sabians' and whoever
believes in God and in the last day and does good deeds they will have
their reward with their Lord, and they shall neither fear nor grieve' (Q 2:62;
cf 5:69)-

But increasingly the Qur'an also spoke critically of Jews and Christians.
Islam's underlying historical vision suggests that the new revelation was sent
in response to the unfaithfulness of the earlier recipients of God's grace. A

dominant motif in the Qur'anic accounts of the previous religions concerns
the contumacy of the Israelites. 'We made a covenant with the Children of
Israel, and we sent to them messengers. And when a messenger came to them
with that which their souls did not desire, some of them they rejected, and
some of them they killed' (Q 5:70). Jesus had predicted the coming of an
Arabian prophet, but had been ignored (Q 61:6). Christians faced condemna
tion on theological grounds, too. The Qur'an dismissed the doctrine of the
incarnation as incompatible with God's essential oneness.

O people of the book, do not go beyond the bounds in your religion, and do
not say anything of God except the truth. Truly, the Messiah Jesus son of
Mary was an apostle of God and his word, which he conveyed to Mary, and a
spirit from him. So believe in God and his apostles, and do not say [that God
is] three. Stop it is better for you. Surely God is one God. He is exalted
beyond having a son. (Q 4.171)

Behind the Qur'an' s growing stridency lay the political realities faced by the
Prophet in Medina. The presence of Jews there may have suggested to
Muhammad that the oasis might prove to be a congenial refuge from the
persecution he faced in Mecca. In fact, relations between the Jewish tribes and
Muhammad quickly broke down. Faced with their reluctance to accept his
political authority and (according to the later Muslim sources) their conspiring
with his enemies among Quraysh, Muhammad first ordered the expulsion of
two of the principal Jewish tribes, and then the execution of the male
members of a third. These events are certainly disturbing, but they reflect
first and foremost the political obstacle that the Jews and their allies among
Quraysh posed to Muhammad's position. Hence, as the Qur'an says: 'You will
find that those who are most strident in their enmity to those who believe are
the Jews and the polytheists.' The Christians, who at this point posed a more

1 The identity of this group is unclear, and the name has been claimed by several different
communities.

Islam

remote political challenge since the seats of Christian power were far removed
from Medina, emerged more favourably: 'And you will find that those who are closest in friendship to those who believe are those who call themselves
Christians' (Q 5:82).

In the end, Muhammad was successful successful, that is, in overcoming the opposition of both Jews and polytheists. In the ten years between the hijra
and Muhammad's death in 11/632, virtually all the Arabs of the Peninsula were
brought into the umma: that is, they were brought to make the act of islam,
acknowledging at once the existence and sovereignty of God and the leader
ship of Muhammad. Among other things this meant paying zakat, which served not simply as an 'alms tax' but also as a public recognition of sub mission to Islam and membership in the umma. So the Qur'an urged Muslims
to resist their polytheist enemies, but 'if they repent and take up prayer and
pay the zakat, then they are your brethren' (Q 9:11). Even Quraysh eventually
joined the parade. Faced with a demonstration of the overwhelming power
the umma had amassed, they too became Muslims. For the first time in history
the Arabs were united under a single state.

The political success of Muhammad in uniting the Arabs had profound consequences for Islam. Most significantly, it confirmed the connection between the Arabs as a people and the new religion. As Muhammad and

the Qur'an grew more sceptical of Jews and Christians they turned increas
ingly to an Arab past, grounding Islam in a specifically Arab identity. Abraham
and his son Ishmael, recognised as the ancestors of the Arabs, played a special
role in this. Abraham, according to the Qur'an, 'was not a Jew or a Christian,
but rather a monotheist' ' who had submitted to God [hamfmuslim]' (Q 3:67).
That Abraham and Ishmael were identified as the builders of the Ka'ba made it
possible to incorporate veneration of that structure and pilgrimage to it into
Muslim ritual:

And when we made the house a place of gathering for the people and a
sanctuary; and take Abraham's station as a place of prayer. And we made a
covenant with Abraham and Ishmael [saying]: 'Purify my house for those who
go around it and those who stay there, in bowing and prostration.' ... And
when Abraham and Ishmael raised the foundations of the house [they said]:
'Our Lord, accept this from us.' (Q 2:125, 127)

Muhammad's desire to perform the ancient ceremonies of the hajj was a
central factor in the submission of Quraysh, and his performance of the

ff The Arabic term hanlf is of uncertain meaning, but generally indicates an individual
who had embraced monotheism before the coming of Islam.

27

The New Cambridge History of Islam

pilgrimage in the final year of his life served as a model for later Muslims.
These factors, even more than the simple fact that the Qur'an was revealed in

Arabic, would bind Arab and Muslim identities closely together once the new
religion moved out of its Arabian homeland.

Despite his success, Muhammad's sudden and unexpected death in 11/632
came as a devastating blow. The community he had assembled faced several
critical challenges, and might easily have collapsed. That it did not do so
testifies to the strength of the religious vision that lay at its base. And the
manner in which the community survived the choices they made, and their
resolution of the challenges they faced decisively shaped the contours of the
emerging Islamic tradition.

Within hours of Muhammad's death the community faced schism.
Significantly, the divisive issue was leadership. There was no question of
anyone succeeding Muhammad as a messenger of God: the Sunni tradition
has insisted that with Muhammad's passing the book of prophecy closed; that
he was, in the Qur'an's words, the 'seal of the prophets' (Q 33:40). But his
authority, especially over political affairs, was another matter. If the commun
ity were to survive, it would have to have a leader. According to the later
Sunni sources Muhammad's followers among the native Medinans (the ansdr,
or 'helpers') contemplated naming one of their own as leader of the com
munity. This was unacceptable to Muhammad's Companions from among
those who had accompanied the Prophet on the hijra (the muhdjirun). This was
a small but powerful group whose status within the community derived from
their early conversion to Islam and their closeness to Muhammad, and also
from the fact that most of them belonged to the aristocratic tribe of Quraysh.
The principal Sunni account describes a confrontation between the ansdr and
several of Muhammad's Qurashi Companions in which the latter persuaded
the Medinan Muslims to accept the leadership of the Prophet's close friend
and father in law, Abu Bakr. In this way the unity of the umma was
preserved.

Abu Bakr thus became the first 'successor' (khalifa) of Muhammad. Under
his leadership the umma survived another dangerous threat. Some of the Arab
tribes living at considerable distance from Medina decided that, with
Muhammad's death, they were freed of their obligations to his community.
As a mark of their independence they refused to send in their zakat. Abu Bakr
and the Muslim leadership rejected their claim, and fought them in what came
to be known as the wars of the ridda ('apostasy'). Abu Bakr's victory over the
rebels did more than preserve the Muslim state as the dominant political
power in the Peninsula. It also confirmed the link between Islam and the
Arabs, by helping to establish the expectation that, unless they had previously

28

Islam

converted to Judaism or Christianity, all Arabs would from now on be
Muslim. Moreover, it lay behind what eventually became a principle of
Islamic law: that apostasy from Islam is unacceptable.

The events of these years between the hijra and the period just after
Muhammad's death are critical to an understanding of what Islam became.
Later Muslims understood the actions of Muhammad and his close
Companions to constitute models for correct Muslim practice. Since the
sources on which the narratives are based are all relatively late, it is possible
that they are not completely reliable: they may project backwards onto the
earliest years of Islam values and practices that emerged only later. But
whether or not they are historical, the narratives are normative. The religious
tradition they portray would develop further, but it is recognisably 'Islam'. At

its heart lay the submission of the individual to the will of a single, creator
God; the acknowledgement of the unique historical role of his messenger,
Muhammad; the organic relationship with, but growing estrangement from,
the other Near Eastern monotheisms; the expression of faith through a precise
array of religious obligations, including prayer, pilgrimage and the payment of
a tax to support the community's work; the conviction that the Muslim
community itself constituted the instrument of God's will, and hence the
recognition that the political order was a matter of deep religious concern; the
special role of the Arabs in the historical formation of that community; and
the privileged claim of Arabs of the Quraysh tribe with demonstrable affinity
for and devotion to the Prophet and his mission to the leadership of that
community.

Classical Islam

Despite its roots in Arabia, classical Islam took shape in a much larger world.
This was the result of Muslim Arabs' sudden and unexpected conquest of
North Africa and much of south west Asia in the century following
Muhammad's death. These conquests brought the Muslim Arabs face to
face with large communities of Jews, Christians, Zoroastrians and others.
For some time the Arabs remained aloof from the peoples of the lands they
conquered, ruling over them but expecting little besides their submission and
payment of taxes. The non Muslim residents of the dar al islam, those terri
tories brought by conquest under Muslim rule, came to be known as dhimmis,
who held a pact of protection with the Muslim state which guaranteed their
freedom to worship in exchange for their political submission. By and large
the dhimmis were left alone. Indeed, conversion to Islam by non Arabs was at

29

first discouraged. The concern was in part fiscal: if the conquered peoples
embraced the new faith, they would be exempt from the special taxes imposed
on non Muslims. But there is a universalist message at least implicit in the
Qur'an, especially in that verse about the Muslims serving as 'witnesses to
mankind', and over time that imperative came to the fore. There were reports
that Muhammad himself, shortly before his death, had urged the rulers of
lands beyond Arabia to embrace the new faith. Eventually and inevitably,
many of the conquered peoples converted to Islam. The timing of the process
is obscure, although it probably peaked some time between the late second/
eighth and the end of the following century. 9 The conversion of large
numbers of non Arabs changed forever the nature of the Muslim umma.
Within two centuries the radically enlarged and transformed Muslim com
munity had defined much more precisely the fundamental doctrines, practices
and institutions of the new faith.

The mature tradition of Islam took shape against the tumultuous political
history of this formative period, which can be summarised quickly. Abu Bakr
died after only two years as caliph. He was replaced first by another close
friend of Muhammad, 'Umar ibn al Khattab, and then by 'Uthman ibn 'Affan.
After 'Uthman's murder most Muslims recognised the Prophet's cousin and
son in law, 'All ibn Abi Talib, as the fourth caliph. 'All, however, failed to
punish 'Uthman's murderers, and the dead caliph's relatives demanded venge
ance. A civil war ensued, at the end of which 'All was dead and 'Uthman's
relative Mu'awiya ibn Abi Sufyan had claimed the throne. Despite consider
able resistance Mu'awiya and his family (the Umayyads) established a dynastic
claim to the caliphate which they held until the middle of the second/eighth
century. At that point they were overthrown by a rebellion on behalf of

another prominent Muslim family belonging to the tribe of Quraysh, and
more closely related than the Umayyads to Muhammad, the 'Abbasids.
Having established a new capital, Baghdad, the Abbasids ruled as caliphs
until the middle of the seventh/thirteenth century, when the invading
Mongols destroyed the city. By the fourth/tenth century, however,
'Abbasid rule was largely formal. Real power had passed to a variety of
local
regimes. By that point the contours of classical Islam were in place.

The most contested religious issue was leadership. The account of Abu
Bakr's selection as caliph told by later Sunni Muslims provided a model
for
who the leader should be and how he should be chosen. He should be the

8 Ibid., pp. 652f.
9 Richard Bulliet, Conversion to Islam in the medieval period
(Cambridge, MA, 19

30

Islam

most worthy man available (Abu Bakr was recognised for his piety, his
early
conversion to Islam and his close relationship with Muhammad); he
should be
from Muhammad's tribe of Quraysh ('we [the emigrants from Quraysh]
are
the commanders', Abu Bakr is said to have told the Medinan Muslims,
'while
you are the helpers' 10); and he should be chosen through a process of
shura
(consultation, as took place between the leaders of the muhajirun and the
ansar), at the end of which there should be a public proclamation of
fealty
(bay'd) to the new caliph. But that model is in fact a retrospective
projection of
the later, fully developed political theory of the Sunni jurists. At the time
there

were no widely accepted standards either for the criteria of leadership or for
the character of the ruler's authority, or even for how he was to be selected.
Sectarian divisions in Islam tend to cluster around these questions, and sectarian identities emerged gradually in response to disagreements over how to answer them.

The most immediate problem was establishing guidelines for the selection
of a new ruler. The early caliphs were chosen because of their close con nections to the Prophet, but the Umayyads and then the 'Abbasids founded
dynasties. They did so in the face of considerable opposition. Some objected to
the very idea of dynastic rule. For example, the earliest Muslim sectarian group, who came to be known as the Kharijites, insisted that the imam's office
should be filled by whoever was the most pious and competent, regardless of
descent. The Kharijites went further, and held that impious or incompetent
rulers can and should be deposed. As a sectarian movement Kharijism never
amounted to much in most of the Islamic world (outside North Africa and some peripheral parts of the Arabian Peninsula, where Kharijites have remained active down to the present day). But early Islamic history is littered
with rebellions against the reigning caliphs, inspired by Kharijite thought. A
much more serious movement of opposition formed around the group known
as the Shfa. These were the 'party of 'Alt (shl'at 'flit), and in their view only
'All ibn Abi Talib and his descendants (and thus through his wife Fatima, Muhammad's daughter, the Prophet's descendants as well) could legitimately
rule. It took well over a century for a distinctive Shfite sectarian movement to
crystallise, but from the late seventh century the peace of the umma was disturbed by rebellions on behalf of various descendants of 'All. The dominant
political theory of the Muslim jurists crystallised against the background of

io Muhammad ibn Jarir al Tabari, Ta'rikh al rusul wa'l muluk, ed. M. J. de Goeje et ah,

15 vols, in 3 series (Leiden, 1879 1901), series I, p. 1840; trans, as The history ofal Tabari,
vol. X: The conquest of Arabia, trans. Fred Donner (Albany, 1993), p. 5.

The New Cambridge History of Islam

conflicts resulting from these movements of opposition to Umayyad and 'Abbasid rule. Those conflicts produced considerable anxiety, and so the dominant Muslim tradition (what came to be known as Sunnism) embraced
political quietism, urging the acceptance of established rulers and making
every effort to legitimise the status quo. The Sunni jurists never grew comfortable with the idea of dynastic rule, but they tacitly accepted it, at least in the case of the 'Abbasids, as long as the caliph was a descendant of
Quraysh.

A more complex issue concerned the nature of the ruler's authority. From the beginning the caliphs were recognised as having executive authority over
the administration and defence of the umma. But it seems that the early caliphs
played an active role in the religious life of the community as well. Indeed,
there was a widespread conviction that the umma required an authoritative
guide (imam) at its head. The Shfa took this idea to the extreme. For them, the
imam that is, the rightful imam, the descendants of 'All who never actually
ruled was the absolute and authoritative arbiter of all matters political and
religious, the only individual endowed by God with correct knowledge of his
will. In the first century or two of the Islamic era, however, the idea that the
caliph was an authoritative guide on religious questions as well as the recognised executive of political affairs was widely shared in the Muslim

community. The caliph as imam was expected to lead prayers, for example,
and to deliver a sermon at noon on Fridays to the assembled male congrega
tion, as Muhammad had done before his death. The sources frequently credit
'Urnar with making important decisions concerning legal questions, such as
setting the punishment for adultery, or matters concerning the cult, such as
defining precise rules for prayer and establishing the pilgrimage to Mecca as a
religious obligation. His successor 'Uthman was (according to the dominant
Sunni narrative, although there are others that contradict it) responsible for
collecting what became the received version of the Qur'an, assembling its
verses into suras (chapters) and arranging them in the order that has prevailed
to this day an action which angered many Muslims who recited the
revelations in a different order, and which may have contributed to
'Uthman's assassination. The Umayyad caliphs, too, claimed authority as
imams over religious questions, not only appointing qadis but sometimes
serving as judges themselves, and settling points of law involving not simply
public administration but matters as diverse as marriage and the manumission
of slaves. Later Muslims chastised the Umayyads for taking for themselves the
title khalifat allah ('successor [or viceroy] of God'), a title implying a good deal
of religious authority, rather than Abu Bakr's more modest khalifat rasul
aUah

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Islam

('successor of the messenger of God'). At the time, however, this seems to
have raised little opposition. 11

Under the 'Abbasids a different vision of leadership and of the proper
distribution of political and religious authority took shape. The roots of
this
development lay in a movement of pious opposition which emerged under
the later Umayyads. These Muslims insisted on putting Islam rather than
Arab
ethnicity or the interests of one particular family at the centre of the
utnma's
identity. They objected to many things about the Umayyads, including
their
alleged indulgence in a profligate lifestyle. At its heart, however, the
objec
tions of the pious focused on what they saw as the Umayyads'
increasingly
arbitrary rule, which they likened to that of pre Islamic monarchs. In
religious
terms, they accused the caliphs of usurping a sovereignty that properly
belonged to God.

The rise of this pious opposition was connected to broader developments
in
the religious sphere. Increasingly, Muslims focused on the person of
Muhammad, or rather on their memories of him. That is, they answered
questions of a religious nature what does it mean to be Muslim? and how
should a Muslim behave? by asking what Muhammad himself had said,
and
how he had acted. Supply met demand, and reports about the Prophet's
words
and deeds circulated more and more widely among the pious. Along with
the
Qur'an, these reports, known as hadith, formed the foundations of a new
edifice of religious scholarship, the construction of which was under way
by
the middle of the second/eighth century. This literature, which included
commentaries on the Qur'an (tafsir) as well as discussions of legal
matters
ranging from taxes to holy war, was the product of an increasingly self
conscious group of religious scholars. These scholars, known collectively
as
the c ulama\ saw themselves as defenders of Muhammad's memory and
of the
religion he inspired.

Some sort of collision between the c ulama' and the authority of the
caliph
was inevitable. At first the c Abbasids embraced the idea that the holder
of the
executive office of the caliph served as the community's authoritative
guide as

well. Indeed, their claim to religious authority is implicit in the regnal names
they took for themselves al mansur ('the one granted victory [by God]'), al
mahdi ('the divinely guided'), al hadi ('the one who guides [to God]') tides
which had a messianic aura. Eventually, however, a de facto separation of
political and religious authority emerged.

ii On the religious authority of the early caliphs see Patricia Crone and Martin Hinds,
God's caliph: Religious authority in the first centuries of Islam (Cambridge, 1986).

33

The process of separation was never complete, but two famous incidents
illustrate the gradual circumscription of caliphal authority. The first involved
the second 'Abbasid caliph, Abu Ja'far al Mansur (r. 136 58/754 75). His vizier
Ibn al Muqaffa', a convert from a family that had served the Sasanian emper
ors, saw the office of caliph through the lens of pre Islamic Persian political
traditions which stressed the absolute, almost divine, authority of the ruler.
To bring order to the increasingly diverse practice of Muslim courts, he urged
the caliph to use his authority to codify Islamic law. Such a move would have
tacitly eliminated the 'ulama^'s role in determining what was properly Muslim.
In the end al Mansur rejected Ibn al Muqaffa ['s advice, and indeed had his
vizier executed. Several decades later al Ma'mun (r. 198 218/813 33) also

sought to confirm the caliph's authority over matters of religious concern.

The test came in an episode known as the mihna, sometimes translated as 'inquisition'. For reasons that are still debated, al Ma'mun sought to impose on the c ulama' a controversial theological doctrine associated with a group known as the Mu'tazila: that the Qur'an is created, not, like God, eternal. Most of the c ulama' subscribed to the opposite view, and in the end they prevailed. A later caliph, al Mutawakkil (r. 232 47/847 61), brought the mihna to an end, and in so doing effectively acknowledged the l ulama''s authority over matters of religious concern.

The separation of political and religious authority in Sunni Islam is not really analogous to the Western doctrine of the separation of Church and state. The office of the caliph or the imam, as the jurists preferred to call him was always conceived in religious terms. Sovereignty, after all, belonged to God. So, for example, the Sunni jurists considered acknowledging the authority of a single imam ruling over the umma a religious obligation of the community. The jurists identified the implementation of the sharfa, the religious law, as one of the imam's fundamental duties, and the qadis of the religious courts were always appointed by, and derived their authority from, the ruler. The caliph was expected to lead the community in the Friday noon prayer, delivering the required sermon (khutba), and to accompany the annual pilgrimage to Mecca although increasingly the caliphs would delegate these responsibilities to others. Nor was the process of separation ever complete. Even after the failure of the mihna subsequent caliphs continued to intervene in disputes over religious doctrine. In the early fifth/ eleventh century, for instance, the caliph al Qadir (r. 381 422/991 1031) issued a public statement which embraced a variety of political and theological doctrines and which stands as one of the fullest statements of Sunni Muslim faith. Nonetheless, the articulation of religious doctrine, and especially of legal principles and

Islam

judgments, was increasingly left to the collective authority of the 'wtonfl
1 . In
this respect, while the imam was the 'successor of the messenger of God',
the
'ulama 1 could also claim to be, in the words of a famous tradition, the
'heirs of
the prophet'.

One of the fullest descriptions of the office and responsibility of the
Sunrii
caliph was written by a jurist named al Mawardi in the mid fifth/ eleventh
century. Al Mawardi' s vision is not normative other jurists' accounts
differed
on details but it will serve as a model for the classical Muslim
understanding
of the office and responsibility of the ruler. The imam is to be of the tribe
of
Quraysh, of legally responsible age and physically and mentally fit. He is
to
have a just character, and sufficient knowledge of the law to exercise
inde
pendent judgement on legal matters. He must have sufficient courage to
undertake the defence of the Muslim community. His responsibilities
demand
action: he is to defend the community and protect its faith from unlawful
innovation, enforce the sharfa either personally or through jurists he
selects,
receive legitimate taxes and booty taken in war and use them in proper
legal
fashion for the benefit of the umma. 12 '

There is a certain irony here, since by this point the actual power of the
caliphs had been considerably circumscribed. Already under the early
Abbasids, the caliphs delegated much of the administration of
government
to their viziers and other bureaucrats. By the late third/ninth century
caliphal

authority was severely and, as it turned out, permanently shrunken. In many
parts of the Islamic empire local dynasts took power. Sometimes these were
governors of the caliphs who established autonomous regimes; sometimes
they were local potentates or military strongmen who seized power for
themselves. Even in the capital, Baghdad, the caliphs' authority was from
the mid fourth/tenth century restricted by a dynasty of Persian Shfite military
leaders (amirs) known as the Buyids. With several important exceptions,
however, most of these local rulers paid at least lip service to acknowledging
the suzerainty of the caliph in Baghdad for example, by seeking a formal
investiture of authority from the caliph. In doing so they demonstrated the
power of the ideal of the unity of the umma under a single caliph for Sunni
Muslims.

For all the importance of disputes over the imamate and the principle of
uniting under a single imam, it was the l ulama' who really defined the
classical

12 'All ibn Muhammad al Mawardi, al Ahkam al sultdniyya, trans. Wafaa H. Wahba as Tfie
ordinances of government (Reading, 1996); Patricia Crone, God's rule: Government and Islam
(New York, 2004), pp. 219 43.

35

The New Cambridge History of Islam

Muslim tradition during the two or three centuries following Muhammad's
death. Indeed, the emergence of the 'ulamfl' as a distinctive and self
conscious

group was probably the most important development in Islam in this period.
Islam, like Judaism, is very much a religion of learning, and it was the arbiters
of that learning, the l ulama\ who would to a large degree define what Islam
became.

The word ^ulama' means 'those who know', and that which they knew was
Him, 'knowledge'. It is not easy to separate the various disciplines of the
Islamic religious sciences. In the first place, there is considerable intersection
between them: inquiry into the community's history, for example, and
Qur'anic exegesis and the study of the Prophet's sayings all overlapped.
Moreover, the chronology of their emergence is still a matter of debate. But
starting with the Qur'an and the hadith, the scholars gradually built up an
intricate and interlocking web of knowledge and speculation about God and
his expectations for his community. Once established, this body of knowledge,
embedded in a vast array of texts and commentaries on those texts, played a
remarkable role as a unifying force in Islamic history. Students studied the
same basic texts, and not just the Qur'an and hadith, in the disparate parts of
the Muslim world. The journey in search of knowledge to learn hadith from
a famous traditionist, or to study a work of religious scholarship with its
author became one of the most highly valued expressions of Muslim piety.

The Muslim religious sciences begin, naturally, with the Qur'an. The
Qur'an, however, is not an easy book to read or to understand. In the first
place, it is not a sustained narrative. The verses of the holy book were revealed
sporadically over the course of twenty years, and the order in which they were
assembled by 'Uthman was in some ways arbitrary. Consequently, stories
about Abraham or Moses, for example, or discussions of topics such as fighting
or the rights of women, are scattered throughout the text. Moreover, the
language of the holy book is difficult, to say the least. Its syntax is often
puzzling, and the vocabulary, to later speakers of Arabic, is frequently
obscure. As time moved away from the historical setting of the revelations,

Muslims increasingly needed help understanding their scripture.

These problems gave rise to several basic disciplines of the Islamic religious
sciences, among them tafsir (exposition), or Qur'anic exegesis. Since the
meaning of Qur'anic verses depended in large degree on the circumstances
in which they were revealed, much of the science of tafsir was historical. So,
for example, the Qur'an told believers that 'once the sacred months are past,
[you should] slay the polytheists wherever you find them' (Q 9:5). But what
was the specific crisis to which that injunction was addressed? Were there

36

Islam

clues in the historical circumstances that would serve to limit the injunction's
force or, conversely, to lend it a more general application? An even more basic
need was determining the meaning of the holy text's Arabic words and
phrases. To meet that need scholars began to construct a grammar of the
Arabic language, and to compile a record of the meaning of old and obscure
Arabic words. The latter project in particular required the preservation of and
commentary on the oldest Arabic texts, including compilations of the poetry
that had been the premier art form of the pre Islamic Arabs. Significantly,
many of the earliest grammarians and students of Arabic literature were of
non Arab background. Their contribution to the study of Arabic linguistics
reminds us both of how important the Arabic language was for all Muslims,

given the status of the Qur'an as God's revealed word, and also of how the
composition of the umma was gradually changing through the conversion of
the non Arab peoples of the Middle East.

The other major textual source of Islamic religious knowledge is the hadlth.
Gradually, during the first two centuries of Islamic history, many Muslims
came to regard the practice of Muhammad and his Companions, known as
sunna, as normative. ' ' The sunna was known through the stories told about
what the earliest Muslims had said and done that is, through hadlth. So
powerful did the attraction of the sunna become that in many ways the hadlth
eclipsed the Qur'an as a source of normative guidance. The classic illustration
of this development concerns the issue of adultery. The Qur'an is fairly clear
on the matter: 'The adulteress and the adulterer flog each of them with a
hundred stripes' (Q 24:2). But hadlth told a different story, in which
Muhammad and his Companions had approved of the stoning of adulterers,
at least those who were legally competent married adults, and the weight of
Prophetic example carried the day with the Muslim jurists. Examples such as
this gave rise to a more general proposition, that 'the sunna is the judge of the
Qur'an, not the Qur'an of the sunna'. 13

Given the normative force of sunna, it was not long before hadlth began to
be fabricated. This was an easy thing to do, since Muslims now lived so widely
dispersed across the Middle East and North Africa, and since at first the hadlth
circulated only orally, passed on by word of mouth from person to person.
The early Muslim scholars were aware of this problem. Gradually they

fff The appellation 'Sunnf of course is related to the word sunna. The connection should
not obscure the fact that Shfa also recognise the force of sunna. ShTite sunna differs,

however, in identifying the words and deeds of their imams as normative as well.

13 Ignaz Goldziher, Muslim studies, ed. S. M. Stern, trans. C. R. Barber and S. M. Stern,
2 vols. (Chicago and London, 1971), vol. II, p. 31.

37

The New Cambridge History of Islam

developed criteria for distinguishing authentic hadith from false. These criteria
stressed the need to identify as secure and uninterrupted as possible a chain of
individual transmitters through whom the stories could be traced back to Muhammad and his Companions although of course these 'chains of author
ity' (asanid, sing, isnad) could be fabricated as well. By the late second/ eighth
century, if not before, scholars had begun the process of collecting and writing
down the hadith, and thus giving the corpus of Prophetic traditions a more or
less definitive form. One of the earliest comprehensive collections of hadith is
found in a compilation by a Medinan jurist named Malik ibn Anas (d. 179/796).
More influential were two by Muhammad ibn Isma'il al Bukhari (d. 256/870)
and Muslim ibn Hajjaj (d. 261/875), who sorted through tens of thousands of
hadith and selected for inclusion only those whose chains of authority they
considered reliable.

The importance of the hadith in the religious life of Muslims can hardly be
overstated. Most importantly, they formed one of the foundations of Islamic
jurisprudence (fiqh), which was crystallising at the same time as (and as part of

the process by which) the body of hadith was stabilised. The amount of actual

legislation in the Qur'an is quite limited; the hadith, by contrast, provide instruction for an enormous range of problems, from matters of personal etiquette to correct commercial practice to prayer. The traditions also include

historical accounts of the life of Muhammad and the earliest Muslim com munity. Consequently they were of great interest to scholars in a variety of

fields. In addition, the hadith played an important role in the popular religious

experience. The public recitation of the major collections of traditions, partic

ularly those of al Bukhari and Muslim, became a standard feature of the celebrations associated with religious holidays, especially the month long fast during Ramadan. In addition to the major compilations, scholars fre quently put together collections of forty hadith selected for their special importance, or their focus on a single topic, and the recitation and memor

isation of these shorter anthologies became a staple of popular piety.

As vast as the range of topics covered by the hadith was, they were not sufficient in themselves to support a comprehensive system of law. The articulation of Islamic law, the sharfa, was the work of the jurists (fuqaha\

smg.faqih) of the classical period. Chief among them was Muhammad ibn Idris

al Shafi c i (d. 204/820), the premier theorist of Islamic jurisprudence. Over time

the jurisprudential methods espoused by al Shafi'I and other jurists crystallised

as 'schools' (madhahib, sing, madhhab) of law not institutions, but traditions

of legal thought. Originally there were many of these schools, but by the early

medieval period only four remained as living traditions, each named for an

38

Islam

eponymous scholar who stood at the head of the tradition: the Hanafi, Maliki,
Shan c i and Hanbali schools. Adherence to one school precluded affiliation with
another, but the adherents of each school recognised the others as legitimate.
In terms of substantive law, the differences between the schools were minor.
Shfa of course have their own jurisprudential traditions, which have some
times been identified as a fifth school, called the Ja'fari (named for Ja c far al
Sadiq, the sixth Shi'ite imam and a scholar widely respected, even by Sunnis),
although the major issues dividing Sunni and Shi c a are historical and political
rather than legal.

The system of jurisprudence developed by al Shafi'I and other jurists
was built upon a series of four 'foundations' (usul): the Qur] an; the surma as
reflected in hadlih; human reason (usually meaning qiyas, 'analogy'); and the
'consensus' (ijma 1) of the scholarly community. The different schools employed
these sources in varying combinations, but patterns in and conflicts over their
use highlight some of the basic principles and characteristics of the Sunni
tradition. The jurists viewed the skarTa as God's law, the fullest revelation of
his will for humanity. Consequently, they were generally sceptical of the free
application of human reason in constructing the law. Indeed, the jurisprudential
traditions developed in part as a reaction against the unfettered use of reason
(ra^y) in the courts of the early community. The Hanbalis, at least in theory,
reject human reasoning entirely, in favour of strict adherence to the precepts
of the Qur] an and surma. More commonly the jurists accepted reason as a
source of law, but limited it to analogy, a jurisprudential tool they may have
borrowed from Jewish law. So, for example, while the Qur'an forbids drinking
wine, it says nothing about beer. But analogy suggests that beer, too, is

forbidden: after all, the problem with wine is that it inebriates, a quality shared
by all alcoholic beverages. The human element, however, is also apparent in the
last but in many ways most important of the foundations: consensus that is,
the consensus of the jurists. While it may be God's law, Islamic law is in the
final analysis what the jurists say it is. The importance of the principle of
consensus is reflected in a well known hadith, in which the Prophet is alleged
to have said: 'My community will never agree upon an error.'

There is a conservative streak to most legal systems, and Islamic law is no
exception. So, for example, if surma was normative, its opposite was bid'a,
'innovation'. According to a well known dictum, also ascribed to Muhammad,
'every new thing is an innovation, and every innovation is an error, and every
error leads to hell'. 14 More controversial was a doctrine that gained ground

14 Ibn al Hajj, Madkhal al sliar' al shxmf, 4 vols. (Cairo, 1929), vol. I, p. 79.

among some jurists from about the fourth/ tenth century, according to which
at some point the 'gates of independent reasoning (ijtihad)' had closed, and
future jurists must practise taqlid, 'imitation' of those who had gone before.
This doctrine was less widely accepted, and had less comprehensive applica
tion, than Western scholars of Islam once thought. Ijtihad is a nuanced legal

concept. It can mean very different things, and many legal scholars insisted
upon its continuing necessity. The kind of ijtihad that is the subject of this
doctrine was a particular kind of independent reasoning: the fresh and unfet
tered construction of a jurisprudential system from the 'foundations' alone.
The doctrine was never universally embraced by the SunnI jurists, although in
later centuries they did increasingly stress the importance of taqlid, and of
adhering to the established rulings of the different schools of law. 15

Despite their conservative nature, legal systems need to create channels for
growth and response to new circumstances, and again Islamic law conforms to
the rule. The normative power of the Prophetic sunna cast a cloud over the
idea of innovation, at least in theory: if Muhammad had not done something,
why should later Muslims? But in practice some innovations had to be
accepted. Many jurists recognised this, and stipulated that not all bid'as were
forbidden. Depending on their nature and their conformity to general princi
pies of the faith, some might be praiseworthy, or even required. 1 One of the
principal mechanisms by which the jurists accepted new things or responded
to new problems was the fatwa. Afatwa is a legal opinion, issued by a legal
scholar (in which capacity he is known as a mufti), in response to some
question: is something, especially some practice, acceptable according to
Islamic law or not? Fatwas had no binding authority; their force reflected
simply the reputation of the jurist issuing the ruling. Consequently there was
plenty of room for disagreement among jurists and, as a result, evolution in
the practical application of legal principles. Indeed, it was one of the hallmarks
of classical Islamic law that it was never codified. Ibn al Muqaffa c 's abortive
appeal to the caliph to assert his authority was the last major attempt to codify
Islamic law until the modernising reforms of the thirteenth/ nineteenth
century.

15 On the subject of ijtihad the most rigorous work is that of Wael Hallaq, esp. 'Was the
gate of ijtihad closed?', IJMES, 16 (1984); A history of Islamic legal theories (Cambridge,
1997); and Authority, continuity, and change in Islamic law (Cambridge, 2001). But see also
Sherman Jackson, Islamic law and tfte state: The constitutional jurisprudence ofShihab al Din
al Qarafi (Leiden, 1996), esp. pp. xxv xxxv.

16 For a particularly clear and interesting example of this see N.J. G. Kaptein, Muhammad's
birthday festival: Early history in the central Muslim lands and development in the Muslim west
until rfte iotfi/i6tft century (Leiden, 1993).

40

Islam

At least in theory, the sharfa touched on virtually all matters of concern to
Muslims. It is for this reason that Islam is often described less as a 'religion'
than as a comprehensive way of life. In this respect it resembles Judaism much
more than it does Christianity. So, for example, the jurists developed a broad
range of guidelines covering commercial life. Sales, loans, business partner
ships, contracts all this and more was regulated by the sharfa, and such
topics took up significant portions of the legal treatises. Commercial law also
demonstrates, however, how flexible and accommodating Islamic legal prac
tice could be. The lawyers went to some lengths to ensure that their legal
rulings were consonant with the custom Qurf) of the marketplace. Where
conflicts arose as, for example, over interest on loans, which the Qur'an
explicitly forbids but which is essential to a functioning market the jurists

developed certain 'tricks' (hiyal) which allowed Muslims to conform to the
letter of Islamic law while accommodating the demands of business life. The
jurists appear to have been swayed not only by custom and business necessity,
but also by other legal systems: for example, they probably borrowed from
Jewish law a flexible model of business partnerships which facilitated a
flourishing commercial life in the classical Islamic Near East. 17

The comprehensiveness of Islamic law and its centrality to what it means to
be a Muslim highlight the similarities between Islam and Judaism. By contrast,
theology serves to differentiate Islam from Christianity. Almost from the
beginning, Christians embraced doctrines Jesus as the son of God, Christ
as the pre existing Logos, the doctrine of the Trinity which required
complex theological explanation and justification. The complexity of
Christian theology is evident even in one of the tradition's basic statements
of faith, the Nicene Creed. Set against such doctrines, Islamic faith seems
remarkably simple. At the heart of Muslim faith is the austere statement
known as the 'witnessing' (shahada): 'There is no god but God, and
Muhammad is his prophet.' The first of the five 'pillars' of Islam, the shahada
figures prominendy in the formal Muslim prayer (salat), and in spontaneous
expressions of Muslim piety. Its simple message resonates with the stark
monotheism of the Qur'an, which is emphatic in its rejection of Christian
doctrines it sees as compromising God's oneness: 'Those who say that God is
the third of three are unbelievers' (Q 5:73).

Eventually Muslims developed a more sophisticated theology. That they
did so was perhaps inevitable, given the diverse religious composition of
the Middle East and the religious competition that diversity engendered.

17 Abraham L. Udovitch, Partnership and profit in medieval Islam
(Princeton, 1970).

41

If Christians had elaborate theological doctrines, then it was necessary for
Muslims to develop them too. Muslim theology has always had an apologetic
character. It is known as Him al kalam, 'the science of speech', kalam implying
'argument'. There were plenty of opportunities for the exchange of argu
ments and ideas across the religious divides. Muslims for the most part did not
live in hermetic isolation from the adherents of other religions, some of whom
on occasion served the Muslim state. Under the c Abbasids Muslim, Jewish and
Christian apologists sometimes gathered for spirited theological debates. And
the influence was not a one way street: the impact of Qur'anic language has
been detected in Christian monastic writings from Syria, while the Byzantine
movement of iconoclasm may have been inspired by the Muslim prohibition
on pictorial representation. 1

But the central issues of Islamic theology grew out of specifically Muslim
concerns, most of them raised by a thoughtful reading of the Qur'an. Those
issues included the nature of the Qur'an itself, and whether it was created by
God or co eternal with him the question that lay behind the mihna imposed
by al Ma'mun. The Qur'an' s emphasis on God's omniscience and omnipo
tence raised doubts as to whether or not human beings could be held
responsible for their own actions essentially a question about the relation
ship of God and justice. How far did God's mercy run? Do major sins mark a
reversion to a state of unbelief? And finally there was the question of the
nature of God himself, and the connection between God and the divine
'attributes' (sifat) associated with the various names by which God is known
in the Qur'an: the 'merciful', the 'all seeing', the 'all knowing', the 'just', the
'generous' and so on. How did these separate attributes comport with God's
fundamental unity and permanence? Did God, for example, really 'see'?

The theologians saw themselves as defenders of the doctrines of Muslim faith.
So, for example, the great historian and polymath Ibn Khaldun (d. 808/1406)
defined Him al kalam as the 'science that involves arguing with logical proofs in
defense of the articles of faith and refuting innovators who deviate in their
dogmas from the early Muslims and Muslim orthodoxy'. 19 At first their principal opponents were those whose rational scepticism challenged beliefs
grounded in simple faith. These included philosophers, such as those who

18 Sidney H. Griffith, 'The view of Islam from the monasteries of Palestine in the early
'Abbasid period: Theodore Abu Qurrah and the Summa Theologiae Arabica, Islam and
Christum Muslim Relations, 7 (1996); Patricia Crone, 'Islam, Judeo Christianity and
Byzantine iconoclasm', JSA I, 2 (1980).

19 Ibn Khaldun, The muqaddimah, trans. Franz Rosenthal, 3 vols. (Princeton, 1967), vol. Ill,
P-34-

42

Islam

participated in the translation movement which, under the patronage of the
early Abbasid caliphs, made many of the classics of Greek philosophy and science available in Arabic. For a time philosophical scepticism was rife in
intellectual circles, and many perceived in 'free thinkers' a serious threat to
Islam. The school of theologians known as the Mu'tazila saw themselves as

a bulwark against such disbelief, and referred to themselves as 'the people of
justice and unity' i.e. those who insisted on God's inherent justice and
who defended the principle of divine oneness. Hence, for example, their
conviction that God's acts are just, and that they could only be just. Hence
too their insistence that Qur'anic statements about God's 'sight' and similar
attributes, or hadith about how the believers will 'see' God in the next life,
should be interpreted metaphorically, and not understood to suggest that
God in some sense has a body. The Qur'an, in their view, was created, not
co eternal with God. If the latter were the case, they argued, would that not
amount to associating something with God in effect, undermining the
principle of divine unity?

The problem was that making this case involved the use of rational argu
ments grounded in philosophical logic in other words, employing the
intellectual tools of the rational sceptics as Ibn Khaldun's definition of
theology implies. And so the theologians were also challenged from the
opposite end of the intellectual spectrum: from traditionalists who
demanded
the uncritical acceptance of Qur'anic statements and doctrines grounded in
hadith, whether or not they made rational sense. Muslims, according to the
traditionalists, had to accept such doctrines bi la kayf, without asking 'how'.
So, for example, if the Qur'an speaks of God sitting on a throne (Q 7:54; 20:5),
then a Muslim must accept that God sits on a throne, without worrying
about the anthropomorphism such a statement might imply. The tradition
alists did not so much resolve the ethical dilemma of monotheism the
tension between an all powerful God and the reality of evil as simply ignore
it, with the affirmation that God commands everything, and that what he does
is good not because he is good, but because he does it. Such views, associated
especially with Ahmad ibn Hanbal, hero of the traditionalist resistance to the
mihna and founder of the Hanbali school of law, were enormously popular in
the third/ninth and fourth/tenth centuries.

Kalam as a discipline survived the opposition of the traditionalists, but by
and large their views of God and of God's relation to the world prevailed.
This

development can be traced in part to Abu '1 Hasan al Ash'ari (d. 324/935^, a
theologian who began his career as a Mu'tazilite but who later embraced traditionalist positions on matters such as God's attributes. What al Ash'ari

then did was to use the tools of kalam in defence of traditionalist propositions
about God. Not everyone was satisfied, and many strict traditionalists remained hostile to any application of the tools of rational thinking to matters
of faith. Nonetheless, theology survived. Al Ash c ariis regarded as the founder
of a school of theological thought that bears his name, and many of the most famous later Muslim theologians, including aljuwaym (d. 478/1085), al Ghazali (d. 505/1111) and Fakhr al Din al Razi (d. 606/1209) were Ash'aris. Its
major rival was a school of theology closely associated with the Hanafi madhhab known as Maturidism. Maturidis embraced positions closer to Mu'tazilite rationalism on matters such as God's attributes and humans' responsibility for their actions. On the other hand, some later Ash'aris moved away from the strict positions of the school's founder, and it was primarily among them that the tools of systematic theology flourished within
the Sunni tradition, despite the persistent opposition of the traditionalists. 20

The finer points of theology, of course, meant little to most people's experience of Islam. For the vast majority of Muslims Islam meant first and
foremost the encounter with God in worship. The elements of worship were
already in place during the Prophet's lifetime, but in the classical period they
took definitive shape. The central act of worship was prayer. The importance
of prayer is evident from the considerable space accorded to it in most

collections of hadith. Islam literally means 'submission' or 'surrendering', and the prostration of the worshipper during the salat symbolised the sub mission of his soul to God. The sources record a number of stories, most of them fanciful, explaining why the number of daily prayers was fixed at five. The most colourful attributes the number to a protracted negotiation between Muhammad and God during the Prophet's legendary ascension to heaven from the Temple Mount in Jerusalem. It has been suggested that the number five may have been borrowed from Zoroastrian practice. In any case, for many Muslims the experience of Islam focused principally on the daily salat.

Prayer was not the only form of ritual engagement, however. Of particular importance was the gathering of the Muslim congregation at noon on Fridays. This gathering involved performing the salat, but to it was added the pro nouncement of a sermon (khutba). Muhammad himself had preached to his community, and at first, following his practice, the caliphs or their official representatives delivered the sermon. As defined by the evolving tradition, the khutba consisted less of a free ranging homily than the formulaic

20 For a general survey of the history of Muslim theology see Tilman Nagel, The history of Islamic theology from Muhammad to the present (Princeton, 2000).

44

Islam

pronouncement of prayers and blessings upon the Prophet and his family and on the Muslim community. At its heart, however, the khutba and its setting had a political purpose. It became customary to mention the name of the ruler

as a marker of his authority; to omit his name, or to mention that of some
rival, constituted an act of rebellion. More generally, the regular gathering of
the community (or at least of its male members) at one time and place served
as a reminder of the umma's unity and political significance.

Islam largely rejected the hierarchical structure of Christian worship.
Where Muslims gathered together for prayer they would be led by an imam
('one who stands in front' the same word the jurists used to refer to the ruler
of the community), but the imam could be any individual with the requisite
knowledge. Neither he nor the preacher (khatib) was distinguished from the
body of worshippers by anything like the Christian practice of ordination or
consecration. Consequently, prayer could take place anywhere, and any place
that served for worship constituted a masjid, a place of prostration', from
which the English term 'mosque' derives. Nonetheless, from the beginning
Muslim rulers and others established structures designed especially for wor
ship. In particular, a large 'gathering mosque' (masjid jam?) constituted one of
the defining features of Islamic cities. In theory each city or settlement would
have one congregational mosque, since the entire community was expected to
gather there on Fridays for prayers and the khutba, although eventually the
growing numbers of Muslims meant that large towns might boast several such
mosques. These congregational mosques include some of the most famous
structures in the Muslim world, including the Prophet's Mosque in Medina,
the Umayyad Mosque in Damascus, al Aqsa in Jerusalem and the great
mosque in Cordoba, Spain, which, after the reconquista, became a Christian
cathedral.

For most Muslims, then, Islam was prayer, at least as far as the religious
experience was concerned. For others, however, prayer constituted only the
first step in a larger project of submitting their wills to that of God. In such

individuals lie the origins of the pietistic tradition which later would be called
Sufism. The historical roots of Sufism are obscure, but the tradition grew out
of a cluster of concerns and developments characteristic of Islam in the
classical period. First and foremost was the desire to break free from the
distractions of this world in order to focus on the promise of the next, and on
the love of God himself. So, for example, Rabi'a of Basra (d. c. 185/801), the
archetypal early Muslim ascetic, embraced her poverty and focused on the
absolute and exclusive love of God. 'O God,' she is reported to have prayed,
'my whole occupation and all my desire in this world of all worldly things, is to

45

The New Cambridge History of Islam

remember Thee, and in the world to come, of all things of the world to come,
is to meet Thee.' 21 Muslim asceticism, unlike the Christian variety, was never
categorical in its renunciation of the world. Monasticism, according to the
Qur'an, was a Christian innovation which God 'did not prescribe for them'
(Q 57:27). But Muslims were moved by the Qur'anic admonition that the life of
this world was mere 'play and amusement' (Q 6:32), and by stories about the
indifference of Muhammad and some of his Companions to wealth. It is
possible, too, that Muslim pietists were influenced by the well developed
tradition of asceticism among the 'holy men' who were so central to the
experience of Late Antique Christianity. The very term 'Sufi' probably derives
from the word suf, 'wool', and may refer to coarse woollen garments
embraced by ascetics in the hot Middle Eastern climate a practice for
which there is certainly Christian precedent.

The pietistic tradition that became Sufism thus was grounded in an ascetic
impulse which Muslims shared with other Middle Eastern faith traditions.
But there were other, more specifically Muslim, concerns involved as well.
Accounts of the earliest Sufis are encrusted with legend, but suggest that they
were connected to the pious opposition that arose in reaction to the perceived
excesses of the Umayyad caliphs. The name of al Hasan al Basri (d. 110/728),
for example, a pious preacher who chastised the Umayyads for their world
liness, often appears in Sufi chains of authority. Other early figures claimed by
the Sufi tradition were deeply involved in waging jihad, particularly along the
Byzantine frontier. 22 Ascetic piety, in other words, did not preclude an active
even violent commitment to the faith. Eventually, in many parts of the
world, including South Asia and Africa, Sufis were instrumental in efforts to
convert non Muslims to Islam.

By the end of the classical period the Sufi tradition moved beyond its ascetic
and pietistic roots to embrace a mystical approach to God. The beginnings of
this development lie in the doctrine of divine love expressed by Rabi'a and
others. It is possible that mystical doctrines in other religions Christianity,
but also South Asian traditions may have influenced Sufi Islam. For example,
the doctrine of the 'annihilation' (fana') of the soul in its contemplation of the
divine, as expressed by Sufis such as Abu Yazid al Bistami (d. 261/874) and
Junayd (d. 298/910), recalls certain aspects of Hindu or Buddhist monism. As
in other religions, Sufi mysticism was built around various theories of esoteric

21 R. A. Nicholson, Muslim saints and mystics (Boston, 1976), p. 47.

22 Michael Bonner, Aristocratic violence and holy war: Studies in the jihad and the Arab

Byzantine frontier (New Haven, 1996), pp. 130 545.

Islam

knowledge special ways, that is, in which the mystic came to 'know' God.
The resulting theological speculation raised concerns with many of the
'ulama\ Perhaps the most controversial Sufi was the Persian mystic al
Hallaj
(d. 309/922). His enthusiastic and apparently outrageous utterances for
example, 'ana '1 haqq' ('I am the truth', al haqq being one name for God)
contributed to his gruesome execution for heresy at the orders of the c
Abbasid
caliph. But it was not only exuberant and theologically dubious outbursts
that
angered and worried the c ulama\ The mystical path is inherently
individual
istic and antinomian, and therefore worrisome to a religious tradition
such
as Islam, focused so heavily on social experience and communal identity.
'Prayer is unbelief, once one knows,' al Hallaj is said to have cryptically
remarked. If the mystical experience could undermine so fundamental a
practice as prayer, what might it do to the larger legal scaffolding that
regulated Muslim life? 23

In the fourth/tenth century the Islamic tradition confronted an existential
crisis. For much of the early Islamic period the distinction between Sunni
and
Shfite Islam was not always clear. But in the fourth/tenth century the
sectarian division became extremely sharp. In part this resulted from the
fact that, in the mid third/ninth century, the principal line of Shfite
imams
came to an end when (according to the ShTa) the twelfth imam went into
protective hiding. The disappearance of the locus of authority for these
ShTa
(who came to be known as Twelvers) forced them to define their own
tradition more precisely. Even more significant was the rise in various
places
of regimes that in one way or another embraced ShTism. These included
the

Isma'ili Fatimid state in North Africa and Egypt, which represented a line of
imams different from those recognised by the Twelvers, and which made a
concerted (although unsuccessful) effort to convince Sunni Muslims through
out the Muslim world to recognise their leadership. The Shfite Buyid regime
in Iraq and Iran did not, oddly, challenge the nominal authority of the 'Abbasid
caliphs, but they did patronise Twelver Shfite scholars, and so helped Twelver
(or Imami) Shfism to take definitive shape.

And so, in the fourth/tenth century, the Islamic tradition generally could have moved in a very different direction. In the end, however, the Shfite moment passed. The Fatimids were never able to convince many to embrace their cause, not even in Egypt. And by the mid fifth/ eleventh century the Buyids were overwhelmed by a new and militantly Sunni political power.

23 On al Hallaj see Louis Massignon, The passion of al Hallaj: Mystic and martyr of Islam,
trans. H. Mason, 4 vols. (Princeton, 1982).

47

The New Cambridge History of Islam

That set the stage for the further development of the Islamic tradition through
the medieval and early modern periods.

Developments in medieval and early modern Islam

The dominant political development of the medieval period was the rise of a
series of Turkish regimes. The 'Turks' who ruled them were a disparate group,
but mostly had roots in nomadic peoples from Central Asia who spoke various

Turkic languages. They entered the Islamic world beginning in the third/ninth
century, first as slave soldiers purchased and trained by the 'Abbasid caliphs.
Later whole tribes of nomadic and recently converted Turks moved out of
Central Asia and into the central Islamic world. By and large these regimes
recognised the lingering authority of the 'Abbasid caliphs, but wielded effec
tive power themselves as sultans from the various cities in which they estab
lished themselves. Among the most important were the Saljuqs, who defeated
the Buyids and ruled over Iraq and Iran in the fifth/ eleventh and sixth/twelfth
centuries; a series of Turkish and Afghan regimes which dominated north
Indian politics from the sixth/twelfth and seventh/thirteenth centuries,
culminating with the Turco Mongol regime of the Mughals; the Mamluks, a
dynasty of slave soldiers who ruled over Egypt and Syria from the middle of
the seventh/thirteenth to the beginning of the tenth/ sixteenth centuries; and
finally the Ottomans, who from meagre origins on the Byzantine frontier in
the seventh/ thirteenth century built the largest and greatest of the medieval
Turkish empires, one which in fact lasted into the twentieth century.

These regimes had an indirect but significant impact on the Islamic reli
gious tradition. In the first place, they were responsible for another round of
expansion in the territories known as the dar al islam. The Saljuqs defeated the
Byzantine emperor at the battle of Manzikert in eastern Anatolia in 463/1071.
In the aftermath Anatolia was overrun by Turkish tribes, who established
Muslim regimes in the peninsula and precipitated its Islamisation. From that
process emerged the Ottomans, who carried the battle and the tide of
conversion into south eastern Europe. One result was the emergence in the
Balkan Peninsula of Muslim communities, such as the Bosnians, which have
remained down to the present day. A similar development took place to the
east. Islam had been present in India since at least the late first/ early eighth

century, but the medieval Muslim regimes there encouraged further conver
sion, as a result of which the Muslim population of South Asia today stands at
about 25 percent. The significance of this expansion in the dar al islam was
accentuated by contrary developments at the other end of the Islamic world.

Islam

The ninth/fifteenth century saw the end of the process known as the recon
quista, whereby the Iberian Peninsula passed out of Muslim hands. Soon Spain's Muslims (as well as its Jews) were either forcibly converted to Christianity or expelled. With the exception of the Balkans, the demographic
growth of Islam in the medieval and early modern periods occurred not in
Europe but elsewhere, particularly in South, South East and Central Asia.

Religious developments in medieval Islam took place against a background
of new and threatening challenges. The rise of the ShTite regimes in the fourth/tenth century had already sharpened sectarian identities and tensions.
But even greater dangers loomed. In the late fifth/ eleventh and sixth/twelfth
centuries a splinter movement within Isma c ili Shfism waged a violent insur
rection against the Sunm status quo in scattered parts of Iran, Iraq and Syria.
The Assassins, as they were known, had little chance of success, but the spectre raised by their campaign of targeted killing prompted widespread
panic (and, in response, violent suppression of Isma'Hi communities in the
cities of the region). 24 Then, in 490/1097, the first Crusaders appeared in Syria.
Their violent challenge to the status quo later Crusader accounts describe
their conquest of Jerusalem that year as an especially bloody affair left the

Muslims in the region bewildered. Before long, however, the Muslims came
to see the Crusaders in a larger context: that they, along with the Normans
who overwhelmed Muslim Sicily and the Spanish and French warriors who
led the reconquista in the west, represented a broad and existential threat from
a newly militant and confident Christian Europe. 25

In the first half of the seventh/thirteenth century an even greater threat appeared: the Mongols. Most of the tribesmen belonging to the Mongol confederation that conquered Iran and penetrated as far as Syria were pagan. In 656/1258 they destroyed the city of Baghdad, and slaughtered the last 'Abbasid caliph to reign there. Muslims at the time understood the Mongols to pose a mortal threat to Islam. The Mamluks, who defeated the Mongols in Syria and so checked their advance, earned the gratitude of many Muslims for having 'saved' Islam. (They also saved what was left of the Abbasid caliphate: a series of refugees from Baghdad who claimed to be members of the 'Abbasid family, whom the Mamluks installed as caliphs but whose authority was not widely recognised in the Muslim world.) By the late

24 See Marshall G. S. Hodgson, The order of Assassins: The struggle of the early Nizarl Isma'ilTs
against the Islamic world (The Hague, 1955).

25 On the impact of the Crusades on Islam see Emmanuel Sivan, L'hlam et la croisade:
Ideologic et propagande dans les reactions musulmanes aux croisades (Paris, 1968); and Carole
Hillenbrand, The Crusades: Islamic perspectives (Chicago, 1999).

49

seventh/thirteenth century, however, the Mongols in the Middle East had
converted to Islam, and established regimes in Iran and the area north of
the
Caucasus essentially similar to others in the region. They included that of
one
of the greatest medieval Muslim warriors, Timur Lang, known to Western
legend as Tamerlane.

The various and apparently nefarious challenges from ShTa, Crusaders,
Mongols and others prompted multiple movements in response. Some of
the earliest and most militant appeared in the west significantly, perhaps,
since it was there that Muslims, faced by the reconquista, found
themselves in
long term retreat. Both the Almoravids and their successors, the
Almohads,
came to power in part as a result of political tensions among the Berber
population of the Maghrib. But both also cast themselves as movements
of
religious reform, campaigning against moral laxity and what they
perceived to
be unlawful innovations. Having been invited by the weakened Spanish
Muslim princes to assist them in their struggle against the Christians, the
Almoravids and especially the Almohads sought to suppress the liberal
and
tolerant cultural atmosphere that, in the third/ninth and fourth/tenth
centur
ies, had made Muslim Spain a cosmopolitan and religiously pluralist
society. 26
Their religious militancy made life uncomfortable for non Muslims as
well,
and many Christians and Jews living under their rule fled. Among them
was
the famous Jewish theologian and philosopher Maimonides, who ended
up in
the comparatively tolerant society of Cairo, where he served the Jewish
community as a judge and the famous Muslim warrior Salah al Din al
Ayyubi, better known in the West as Saladin, as personal physician.

The Almohads were unusual for their xenophobia, but a growing
suspicion
of non Muslims was a widespread and understandable response to
persistent
external threats. In Syria and the central Muslim world the appearance
of the
Crusaders sparked renewed interest in jihad. Several medieval scholars
pro

duced treatises collecting hadith on the subject, or extolling the virtues of
waging war on Islam's behalf. The jurists recognised jihad as what they called
afard kifaya, an obligation not on individual Muslims but on the community as
a whole. But when Islam itself was threatened, they said, jihad became afard
'ayn, an individual responsibility incumbent on all Muslims. (It is striking that
the i998fatwa by a group of Muslim radicals including Osama bin Ladin cites
several Crusader era jurists in support of the proposition that Muslims today

2.6 On the cultural florescence of early medieval Spain and its suppression see Maria Rosa
Menocal, The ornament of the world: How Muslims, Jews, and Christians created a culture of
tolerance in medieval Spain (New York, 2002).

Islam

are enjoined individually to fight against the Americans.) The targets of the
new jihad spirit were Islam's external enemies, Christian Europeans and pagan
Mongols, whom envoys of the Pope approached about an alliance against the
Muslims. (Xenophobia often has deep roots.) But inevitably the dhimmis,
especially Christians, came under a cloud of suspicion, since they shared a
religion with some of the most dangerous enemies. There are indications that
their life grew more difficult in this period, as restrictions on their activities,

including public celebrations of their faith, were enforced more rigorously.

Internally, too, Muslim society experienced a sort of 'circling of the wagons'
in the face of the new medieval challenges. The period has sometimes been
called one of a 'Sunni revival', and indeed the Turkish military regimes
were by and large enthusiastically Sunni. What the period really witnessed,
however, was a process of homogenising religious life, circumscribing the
parameters of permitted thought and behaviour and giving greater force
to the 'consensus' (ijma c) of the jurists and the scholarly elite. The public
creedal statement issued by the caliph al Qadir in the fifth/ eleventh century
(see p. 34 above) constituted an early benchmark. The statement reflects the
consensus of traditionalist scholars about what 'Islam' was, and by and large
they defined it through a series of negations: to be a Sunni Muslim meant to
reject Christianity, to reject Kharijite intolerance and Shi'ite sectarianism, to
reject Mu'tazilism and speculative theology more generally. Another aspect of
the homogenising trend was a reinvigorated opposition to innovation (bid c a).
This constituted one of the dominant themes of medieval Islamic religious
discourse, and formed the subject of numerous polemical treatises composed
between the sixth/twelfth and tenth/ sixteenth centuries; interestingly, many
of them were written by scholars originally from the Maghrib. This is not to
suggest that innovation stopped; simply that many of the c ulama' rejected the
idea of innovations as a matter of principle. The charged atmosphere of the
time is reflected in the language of polemical discourse, in which a scholar
might argue that waging war against innovating Muslims was 'preferable to
doing so against the infidels of the House of War, as the damage [that they
inflict on Islam] is more severe'. 27

Like other areas of religious experience, the practice of Islamic law, which
was so central to Muslim identity, underwent a degree of regularisation. By
the medieval period most of the earlier schools of law had ceased to exist as

27 Berkey, Formation of Islam, pp. 189 202; Jonathan Berkey, 'Tradition, innovation and the
social construction of knowledge in the medieval Islamic Near East', Past and Present,
146 (1995).

living traditions, and only the four surviving madhahib the Hanafis, the Malikis, the Shafi'is and the Hanbalis were recognised as legitimate. In some cases the madhahib became vehicles for the expression or advancement
of other interests. The Hanbalis in particular often constituted not just a school
of law but a broad based community dedicated to traditionalist Islam, and
Hanbali crowds in Baghdad sometimes rioted against Shfism or speculative
theology of which they disapproved. 2 But the differences of jurisprudence
and positive law separating one school from the next were relatively minor,
and adherents of one school generally recognised the others as orthodox expressions of Sunni Islam. Although ijtihad did not disappear entirely, the
force of accepted opinion within the madhahib increasingly circumscribed the
judgments most individual jurists could make. The doctrine oftaqlid required

that jurists accept not only the jurisprudence but the substantive judgments of
their predecessors.

New institutional forms reinforced the regularisation of religious life. Chief
among them was the madrasa. The madrasa first appeared in eastern Iran in the
fourth/tenth or fifth/ eleventh century, but by the seventh/thirteenth and
eighth/fourteenth had become a ubiquitous presence in Islamic cities in the
Middle East and South Asia. The medieval madrasa bore little resemblance to
the similarly named religious schools allegedly breeding Islamic militants
which have come to light in the early twenty first century. The madrasa was
principally an institution dedicated to instruction in fiqh (Islamic jurispru
dence) according to one or more of the surviving madhahib. The institutions
themselves had little impact on instruction or the curriculum. The trans
mission of religious knowledge depended on the informal ties established
between teachers and students, just as it had in the centuries before the
madrasa made its appearance. One did not 'enrol' in a madrasa; one attended
classes given by a particular teacher which happened to meet in one (although
those classes might also take place elsewhere: in a mosque or a home, for
example). Similarly, one did not 'graduate' from an institution; instead, one
received an ijaza, a 'licence' to teach or to transmit a particular text issued by
the master with whom one had studied. But the spread of madrasas did have
an enormous impact on the networks of scholars through whom religious
knowledge was transmitted and by whom Islam was defined. The madrasas'
endowments created paid professorships which for the first time provided

28 See George Makdisi, Ibn 'Aqll et la resurgence de ITslam traditionaliste au Xle siecle (Ve Steele
de VHegire) (Damascus, 1963); on Shafi'is and Hanafis as political factions in medieval
Nishapur see Richard W. Bulliet, The patricians of Nishapur: A study in medieval Islamic
social history (Cambridge, MA, 1972).

Islam

regular compensation for the c ulama , 's activities. This helped to clarify the
social and professional identity of the learned elite. And the number of these
schools, and consequently the number of scholars they supported, was con
siderable. By the ninth/fifteenth century, for example, Cairo probably had
well over one hundred such institutions. All this helped to establish the
'ulama\ the class of religious scholars, as a formidable and influential compo
nent of medieval Islamic urban society. 29

A similar and equally ubiquitous institution was the Sufi 'convent' (known
by several terms: khanqah, ribat, zawiya and others). Like the madrasa, a typical
khanqah might provide lodging and meals, and possibly stipends, to support
the mystics who lived and worshipped in it. There are certain parallels
between the Sufi convents and Christian monasteries, but there are also
important differences. In particular, the khanqah, unlike the monastery, was
principally an urban institution. More importantly, its residents did not in
most cases permanently isolate themselves from the surrounding society.
Sufis often married and had families, and worked in 'normal' professions.
But the spread of khanqahs did reflect the regularisation of the mystical life. It
is significant that the functions of madrasas and khanqahs overlapped.
Architecturally there was litde to distinguish them, and the activities they
supported were often one and the same: Sufis living in khanqahs might take
classes in hadith or Islamic jurisprudence, while students in madrasas might
engage in Sufi rituals.

The spread of Sufi convents reflects one of the most important develop
ments of the medieval period: the integration of Sufism into mainstream
Muslim religious life. By the late classical period Sufi mysticism had evolved

in directions many 'ufoma^ considered subversive. Much of their opposition,
however, dissipated in the ensuing centuries. This was due in part to scholars
such as Abu Hamid al Ghazali (d. 505/1111) and Ibn 'Ata 3 Allah al Iskandari (d.
709/1309), who embraced Sufism, sometimes despite initial misgivings, and
saw Sufi practice as a means to cultivate a more sincere and transformative
piety. The acceptance of Sufism was eased by the routinisation of Sufi practice.
By the fourth/tenth and early fifth /eleventh centuries some mystics had begun

29 The literature on the madrasa, religious education and the medieval 'ulama' is enor
mous. The interested reader should start with George Makdisi, Tfie rise of colleges:
Institutions of learning in Islam and the West (Edinburgh, 1981); Carl Petry, The civilian elite
of Cairo in the later Middle Ages (Princeton, 1981); Jonathan Berkey, The transmission of
knowledge in medieval Cairo: A social history of Islamic education (Princeton, 1992); Michael
Chamberlain, Knowledge and social practice in medieval Damascus, 1190 lyo (Cambridge,
1994); and Daphna Ephrat, A learned society in transition: The Sunni 'ulama' of eleventh
century Baghdad (Albany, 2000).

53

The New Cambridge History of Islam

to develop rules to guide adepts, and so to discipline and routinise the tradition.
At some point Sufis began to speak of spiritual discipline as a form of jihad or

'struggle' what many jurists themselves came to recognise as the 'greater jihad', distinct from and more important than the 'lesser jihad' of holy war. 3 "

This process was carried further by the crystallisation of the 'brotherhoods' or 'orders' (turuq, sing, tariqa). By joining an order an adept would subject himself to a certain discipline, and also to the authority of a master (shaykh) who would guide him on his spiritual path. By the late medieval period affiliation with at least one tariqa was common if not universal among the 'ulama\ Even those scholars who continued to fault some mystics for offensive practices or beliefs, such as Ibn Taymiyya, were themselves often members of Sufi tariqas.

The new forms and institutions of religious life transformed the relation ship between the religious and political elites. Ever since the mihna the ^ulama' had prized their hard won independence from political authority. In the absence of any formal institutional structure such as a Church, and with the c ulama''s own authority only loosely organised around the principle of con sensus, the Muslim state had been unable to exercise direct and consistent control over the religious establishment. But the new institutional structures changed that equation. Mosques, madrasas and khanqahs were generally constructed and endowed by individuals, as acts of charitable donation, rather than by the state. But most of those with the means to establish such an institution belonged to the political elites. This nurtured an increasingly sym biotic relationship between the 'ulama' and their political benefactors.

For the l u\ama' the benefits were tangible and obvious. The institutions and their endowments supported them and their activities directly and materially. This did not make them subservient to the state and the political elites, but it is striking that medieval rulers increasingly drew on the 'uforna 1 for political assistance. The ruling elites most responsible for confronting the Crusaders in Syria and Palestine, for example, relied heavily on the ^ulama' to mobilise

resistance to the European Christian invaders. Rulers such as Nur al Din ibn
Zangi and his more famous successor, Saladin, commissioned scholars to
compose treatises extolling the virtues of jihad, or lauding the splendours of
the city of Jerusalem, as a way of cultivating enthusiasm among the Muslim
population for military campaigns against the Crusaders. c Ulama' might
accompany troops into battle, reciting hadith about the military struggles of
Muhammad and the early Muslims.

30 David Cook, Understanding jihad (Berkeley, 2005), pp. 32

54

Islam

In the later medieval period the relationship between state and religious
establishment grew closer. Rulers did not attempt to return to pre mihna days,
or make extravagant claims about their authority to establish religious
doctrine or determine legal practice. But over time the l ulama' did increasingly
become susceptible to political manipulation and control. In Cairo, for
instance, the Mamluk sultans acquired or usurped the right to appoint pro
fessors in the leading madrasas. The shaykh of one of the leading khanqahs in
Cairo acquired the title of shaykh al shuyukh ('master of masters'), an office
which he held by royal appointment, and in which official capacity he
exercised some sort of supervisory responsibilities for all the Sufis of Egypt.
In the late ninth/fifteenth century a dispute broke out among the Sufis of
Cairo concerning some controversial lyrics by a Sufi poet named Ibn al Farid
(d. 632/1235). The theological issues at stake led to dissension among the
mystics, but the enormous popularity of Ibn al Farid and his poetry gave

the dispute a political dimension, and the matter was only resolved when the reigning sultan intervened to affirm the opinions of those who viewed Ibn al Farid' s verse as perfectly orthodox. 31

By the early modern period, with the rise of more centralised states, the authority exercised by rulers over the religious establishment became even
more pronounced. The Safavids of Iran present a rather unusual case. The
Safavids were in origin one of a number of heterodox Sufi sects active among
the nomadic Turkmen populations of eastern Anatolia in the eighth/four
teenth and ninth/fifteenth centuries. Gradually they drifted towards Shf
ism,
and under the leadership of their pir Isma'il (d. 930/1524) they conquered Iran,
establishing a dynasty that lasted into the twelfth/eighteenth century. As rulers the Safavids began a campaign to convert the Iranian population, up
to this point overwhelmingly Sunni, to Twelver Shfism. To accomplish this
the Safavid shahs created a Shfite clerical establishment through recruiting
Shfite scholars from centres of Shfite learning elsewhere in the Muslim world,
and through the establishment of Shfite mosques and schools. The Safavids
then entrusted to the clerics the conversion of the country, authorising them
to pursue a campaign of (sometimes forced) conversion in the towns and villages of Iran. All of this made the Shfite ^ulama' of Iran particularly depend
ent on the patronage of the rulers.

To the west, the Ottomans present another example of growing state control over the religious establishment. The Ottoman example had greater

31 T. Emil Homerin, From Arab poet to Muslim saint: Ibn al Farid, his verse, and his shrine
(Columbia, SC, 1994), pp. 55 75.

55

long term significance, both because they were Sunms and because the
Ottomans at one point or another controlled virtually the whole of the
Middle East outside Iran, and so left their imprint on a much wider field.
In
the Ottoman empire the 'ulama' were for the first time organised in a
formal,
institutional hierarchy; along with the military and the bureaucracy, the
religious establishment (which the Ottomans referred to as the Hlmiyye)
served
as one of the foundations of the political structure. The leading qadis,
preach
ers, professors in the madrasas and other important religious and legal
figures
became in fact employees of the state. Ottoman qadis not only served as
appointed judges in religious courts, but undertook a variety of
administrative
responsibilities on behalf of the state in the territories under their
jurisdiction.
At the top of the religious hierarchy stood the seyhiilislam, a scholar
appointed
by the sultan who supervised the entire religious institution. 32.

The authority of the Ottoman government over the religious institution
was also extended by the use of the title caliph. The Ottomans had
occasion
ally invoked the title since the early ninth /fifteenth century. At first they
claimed it simply as an honorific, as something due to them by virtue of
the
extent of their power. By the tenth/ sixteenth century, however, after the
disappearance of the rump 'Abbasid caliphate of Cairo, some Ottoman
jurists
employed the term in a new, juridical sense, to indicate that the ruler had
the
right, not to create law, but to rationalise and homogenise the law by
choosing
from among the disparate rulings and interpretations included within the
consensus of the c ulama\ These claims foreshadowed later, thirteenth/
nineteenth century efforts by the Ottoman sultans to produce a definitive
code of Islamic law. 33

Against these homogenising tendencies must be set the persistent
diversity

and complexity of the Islamic tradition. The c ulama , 's reinvigorated campaign

against innovations proved incapable of stamping them out indeed, the very

vigour of that campaign points to the stubborn popularity of religious prac

tices of which the 'ulatna' disapproved. These practices were many and varied,

but they shared certain common characteristics. They were often associated

with Sufi celebrations. Others reflect a remarkable syncretism, with Muslims,

32 R. C. Repp, 'The altered state of the ulema', in Thomas Naff and Roger Owen (eds.),
Studies in eighteenth century Islamic history (Carbondale, 1977); R. C. Repp, The mufti of
Istanbul: A study in the development of the Ottoman learned hierarchy (London, 1986);
Madeleine Zilfi, The politics of piety: The Ottoman ulema in the postclassical age (1600 1S00)
(Minneapolis, 1988).

33 On the Ottoman use of the title caliph see Colin Imber, Ebu's su'ud: The Islamic legal
tradition (Stanford, 1997).

Islam

Jews and Christians participating in each other's festive holidays Egyptian
Muslims, for example, participating in Coptic Easter festivities, or purchasing
amulets inscribed with Hebrew letters. Most of the practices of which the
'ulama' disapproved concerned matters of personal hope or daily survival
rather than issues of law or theology. Many of them sought to invoke the

spiritual power (baraka) of some revered individual, living or dead, or to claim

his intercession (shafa'a) perhaps with some temporal ruler, or perhaps with

God. Hence the popularity throughout the Islamic world of pilgrimage (ziyara, 'visiting', as opposed to the formal hajj) to local shrines or to the tombs of pious scholars or 'saints'. 34

Sufism, too, despite its integration into the Islamic mainstream, remained a source of ideas and practices that rankled some in the religious establish

ment. Sufi mystical speculation continued to flirt with theologically trouble

some ideas, particularly those that tended to reduce the sharp distinction between God and his creation. Such, for example, was the doctrine of wahdat al wujud, or the 'oneness of being', articulated by the Andalusian mystic Ibn al 'Arabi (d. 638/1240). Ibn al Arabl's ideas were in fact fantas tically complex, and so resist easy classification, but they did prove remark

ably popular. Their influence can be seen in the Persian poetry of the Anatolian mystic Jalal al Din Rumi (d. 672/1273). Such ideas percolated more widely through the population via a variety of ritual practices which gave practical expression to them. So, for example, Rumi and the dervishes

who followed him developed a mode of enthusiastic communion with the divine through music and dance. Critics worried not only about the theo logical dubiousness of Ibn al 'Arabl's doctrines and Rumi's poetry, but about

the disruptive potential and erotic undertones of music, dance and other forms of ecstatic worship adopted by some Sufis. Mystical excess and enthusiasm threatened the established religious order in other ways too. The inherent individualism and anarchism of the mystical path pushed some

to adopt a sceptical attitude towards shar7a based orthopraxy. In a famous

couplet Rumi himself gave expression to a kind of antinomianism which challenged the very foundations of religious identity: 'What is to be done, O Muslims? For I do not recognize myself./ I am neither Christian, nor Jew,

nor Zoroastrian, nor Muslim.' 35

34 On the ziyara see Christopher S. Taylor, In tfte vicinity of the righteous: Ziyara and the
veneration of Muslim saints in late medieval Egypt (Leiden, 1999); Joseph Meri, The cult of
saints among Muslims and Jews in medieval Syria (Oxford, 2002). On the phenomenon of

'popular religion' generally, see Berkey, Formation of Islam, pp. 248 57.

35 R. A. Nicholson, Selected poems from the Divani Shamsi Tabriz (Cambridge, 1898), p. 125.

There were in fact plentiful channels through which Muslims outside the ranks of the leading 'ulama' could influence the general experience of Islam.
The khutba delivered on Fridays in congregational mosques necessarily retained a formal even official character, but many other opportunities presented themselves for pious and interested individuals to preach to gather
ings of Muslims. Popular preachers and raconteurs of religious tales held sway
in mosques, homes, the street and other informal settings, delivering homilies
to men and women both. Concerned jurists worried about the suitability of
the religious messages they preached, but the depth of their concerns and the
frequency of their complaints suggest that for many Muslims these itinerant or
poorly educated preachers constituted the principal source of religious instruction and guidance. 36 The example of popular preachers serves as a
reminder that, despite the growing regularisation of religious life, and despite
too the ever closer alliance of c ulama' and the Sunni state in the late medieval
and early modern period, the Islamic tradition remained creative and flexible.
Opposition to bii l a notwithstanding, innovations took root, and often the
c ulama' themselves were persuaded by the force of their popularity to accept
them as legitimate expressions of Muslim piety. The ziyara is a case in point.

So too is the celebration of the Prophet's birthday, which dates only from the
early Middle Ages. Some scholars worried, no doubt with good reason, that
the festivities bore too close a resemblance to Christmas. But ultimately the
holiday became, with l ulama' approval, one of the most popular in the Muslim
calendar. 37

Because of these underlying tensions between the leading ^ulatna' and
more popular preachers and shaykhs, between the growing control exercised
by political authorities and the persistent independence of the religious
establishment Islam never lost its capacity for renewal. Western complaints
about Islam's supposed need for a 'reformation' miss the dynamism and
capacity for reinventing itself at the religion's heart. 38 On the cusp of the
modern period this dynamism was fully at work. In the twelfth/ eighteenth
century the powerful and centralised states that had dominated political
life since the tenth/sixteenth century the Ottoman, Safavid and Mughal
empires weakened (and, in the case of the Safavids, disappeared).

36 Jonathan P. Berkey, Popular preaching and religious authority in the medieval Islamic Near
East (Seattle, 2001).

37 See Kaptein, Muhammad's birthday festival.

38 John Voll, 'Renewal and reform in Islamic history: Tajdid and islah', in John L. Esposito
(ed.), Voices of resurgent Islam (New York, 1983); Nehemiah Levtzion and John Voll (eds.),
Eighteenth century renewal and reform in Islam (Syracuse, 1987).

58

Islam

Simultaneously, various movements of reform and renewal set the stage for important developments in the modern world. Most notable among them was that associated with a cantankerous Arabian scholar, Muhammad ibn Abd al Wahhab, in Arabia, inspired in part by the writings of Ibn Taymiyya, and another driven by one of the leading Muslim scholars of India, Shah Wall Allah of Delhi.

The movements led by these religious reformers and their successors have produced disparate results, but they have also shared certain common characteristics. They have tended to combine a fierce commitment to the principle of restoring an idealised Muslim past associated with Muhammad and his Companions with the recognition that changed conditions require the full exercise of all tools, including in some cases that of unfettered ijtihad, to reconstruct a reformed Islam capable of meeting the new challenges of the modern world. They have also tended to look to political forces to help implement the necessary reforms, and to capitalise on a revitalised spirit of jihad in the Muslim community to defend it against its external enemies. After the twelfth/eighteenth century the power of those external enemies principally the Western powers proved to be overwhelming. Muslims throughout the world have had no choice but to confront the challenges posed to them by the West. Their efforts to do so have been shaped in part by movements of renewal and reform which have been both modern in their application and firmly grounded in an authentic and evolving Muslim tradition.

59

Sufism

ALEXANDER KNYSH

Introduction

The ascetic and mystical element that was implicit in Islam since its very
inception grew steadily during the first Islamic centuries (the seventh
ninth
centuries CE), which witnessed the appearance of the first Muslim
'devotees'
('ubbad; nussak) in Mesopotamia, Syria and Iran. By the sixth/ twelfth
century
they had formed the first ascetic communities, which spread across the
Muslim world and gradually transformed into the institution called tariqa
the mystical 'brotherhood' or 'order'. Each tariqa had a distinct spiritual
pedigree stretching back to the Prophet Muhammad, its own devotional
practices, educational philosophy, headquarters and dormitories as well
as
its semi independent economic basis in the form of a pious endowment
(either
real estate or tracts of land). Between the thirteenth and sixteenth
centuries
CE Islamic mysticism (Sufism) became an important part of the Muslim
devotional life and social order. Its literature and authorities, its
networks
of tariqa institutions and its distinctive lifestyles and practices became a
spiritual and intellectual glue that held together the culturally and
ethnically
diverse societies of Islamdom. Unlike Christian mysticism, which was
mar
ginalised by the secularising and rationalistic tendencies in western
European societies, Sufism retained its pervasive influence on the
spiritual
and intellectual life of Muslims until the beginning of the twentieth
century.
At that point Sufi rituals, values and doctrines came under sharp
criticism
from such dissimilar religio political factions as Islamic reformers and
mod
ernists, liberal nationalists and, somewhat later, Muslim socialists. They
accused Sufis of deliberately cultivating 'idle superstitions', of stubbornly
resisting the imposition of 'progressive' and 'activist' social and
intellectual
attitudes and of exploiting the Muslim masses to their advantage. Parallel
to these ideological attacks, in many countries of the Middle East the
economic foundations of Sufi organisations were undermined by agrarian

Sufism

reforms, secularisation of education and new forms of taxation instituted by
Westernised nationalist governments. The extent of Sufism's decline in the
first half of the twentieth century varied from one country to another. On
the whole, however, by the 1950s Sufism had lost much of its former appeal
in the eyes of Muslims, and its erstwhile institutional grandeur was reduced
to low key lodges staffed by Sufi masters with little influence outside their
immediate coterie of followers. At that point it seemed that in most Middle
Eastern and South Asian societies the very survival of the centuries old Sufi
tradition and lifestyle was in question. However, not only has Sufism
survived, it has been making a steady comeback of late. 1 Alongside tradi
tional Sufi practices and doctrines there emerged the so called 'neo Sufi'
movement whose followers seek to bring Sufi values in tune with the
spiritual and intellectual needs of modern men and women.

This chapter provides a brief historical overview of Sufism's evolution from
a simple world renouncing piety to the highly sophisticated doctrines and
rituals practised primarily, albeit not exclusively, within the institutional
framework of the Sufi tafiqa.

The name and the beginnings

Normative Sufi literature routinely portrays the Prophet and some of his
ascetically minded Companions as 'Sufis' (al sufiyya) avant la lettre. However,
the term does not seem to have gained wide currency until the first half of the
third/ninth century, when it came to denote Muslim ascetics and recluses in
Iraq, Syria and, possibly, Egypt. More than just fulfilling their religious

duties, they paid close attention to the underlying motives of their actions,
and sought to endow them with a deeper spiritual meaning. This goal was
achieved through a thorough meditation on the meaning of the Qur'anic revelation, introspection, imitation of the Prophet's pious ways, voluntary poverty and self mortification. Strenuous spiritual self exertion was occasion
ally accompanied by voluntary military service (jihad) along the Muslim Byzantine frontier, where many renowned early devotees flocked in search
of 'pure life' and martyrdom 'in the path of God'. Acts of penitence and self
abnegation, which their practitioners justified by references to certain Qur'anic verses and the Prophet's normative utterances, 2 were, in part, a

1 A. Knysh, 'The tariqa on a Landcruiser: The resurgence of Sufism in Yemen', Middle East
journal, 55, 3 (2001).

2 M. Smith, Studies in early mysticism in the Near and Middle Bast, 2nd edn (Oxford, 1995),
pp. 125 52; cf. A. Arberry, Sufism: An account of the mystics of Islam (London, 1950), pp. 15 30.

reaction against the Islamic state's newly acquired wealth and complacency as
well as the 'impious' pastimes of the Umayyad rulers and their officials. For
many pious Muslims these 'innovations' were incompatible with the simple
and frugal life of the first Muslim community at Medina. While some religio
political factions, such as the Kharijites and the early Shfa, tried to topple the

'illegitimate' government by force of arms, others opted for a passive protest
by withdrawing from the corrupt society and engaging in supererogatory acts
of worship. Even though their meticulous scrupulousness in food and social
intercourse were sometimes interpreted as a challenge to secular and military
authorities, they were usually left alone as long as they did not agitate against
the state. As an outward sign of their pietistic flight from the 'corrupt' world,
some early devotees adopted a distinct dress code a rough woollen habit,
which set them apart from the 'worldlings' who preferred more expensive and
comfortable silk or cotton. Wittingly or not, the early Muslim devotees
thereby came to resemble Christian monks and ascetics, who also donned
hair shirts as a sign of penitence and contempt for worldly luxuries. 3 In view of
its strong Christian connotations some early Muslim authorities sometimes
frowned upon this custom. In spite of their protests, wearing a woollen robe
(tasawwuf) was adopted by some piety minded elements in Syria and Iraq
under the early Abbasids. By the end of the second /eighth century, in the
central lands of Islam the nickname siifiyya ('wool people' or 'wool wearers';
sing, suft) had become a self designation of many individuals given to an
ascetic life and mystical contemplation.

Basic assumptions and goals

While many early Muslims were committed to personal purity, moral
uprightness and strict compliance with the letter of the divine law, there
were some who made asceticism and pious meditation their primary vocation.
These 'proto Sufis' strove to win God's pleasure through self imposed depri
vations (especially abstinence from food and sex), self effacing humility, super
erogatory prayers, night vigils and meditation on the deeper implications of
the Qur'anic revelation. In their passionate desire for intimacy with God they
drew inspiration from selected Qur'anic verses that stressed God's immanent

and immediate presence in this world (e.g. Q 2:115; 2:186; 50:16). They found

3 A. Voobus, Syriac and Arabic documents regarding legislation relevant to Syrian asceticism
(Stockholm, i960); cf. J. van Ess, Theologie und Gesellschaft im 2. und ^Jahrhundert Hidschra,
6 vols. (Berlin and New York, 1991 5), vol. II (1992), pp. 88, 94, 610 etc.

62

Sufism

similar ideas in the Prophetic traditions (hadlth), some of which encouraged
the faithful to 'serve God as if they see Him', to count themselves among the
dead, to be content with the little that they have over against the abundance
that may distract them from the worship of their Lord and to constantly think
of God. 4 In meditating on such scriptural passages, and in imitating the pious
behaviour ascribed to the first Muslim heroes, the forerunners of the Sufi
movement developed a comprehensive set of values and a code of behaviour
that can be defined as 'world renouncing' and 'other worldly oriented'. It may
have had an implicit political intent, as some early ascetics consciously
abandoned gainful professions, avoided any contact with state authorities or
even refused to inherit in protest against the perceived injustices and corrup
tion of the Umayyad regime. 5 Many disenchanted devotees found solace in the
more benign aspect of divine majesty, and gradually started to speak of love
between God and his servants, citing relevant Qur'anic verses such as Q 5:54.

With time the initial world renouncing impulse was augmented by the idea of
mystical intimacy between the worshipper lover and his divine beloved. Celebrated in poems and utterances of exceptional beauty and verve, it was
counterbalanced by the worshipper's self doubt and fear of divine retribution
for the slightest slippage in thought or action (ghafla). Particularly popular
with the early ascetics and mystics was the idea of a primordial covenant between God and the 'disembodied' human race prior to the creation of individual human beings endowed with sinful and restive bodies. Basing themselves on the Qur'an (Q 7:172) the proto Sufis argued that during this
covenant the human souls bore testimony to God's absolute sovereignty and
promised him their undivided devotion. However, once the human souls were given their sinful bodies and found themselves in the corrupt world of
false idols and appearances, they forgot their promise and succumbed to the
drives and passions of the moment. The goal of God's faithful servant, there
fore, consists in 'recapturing the rapture' of the day of the covenant in order to
return to the state of primordial purity and faithfulness that characterised the
human souls before their actual creation. To this end the mystic had to contend not only with the corrupting influences of the world, but also with his
own base self (nafs) the seat of egotistic lusts and passions. These general

4 WakT ibn aljarrah, Kitdb alzuhd, ed. 'Abd al Rahman al Faryawanl, 2nd edn, 2 vols.
(Riyadh, 1994), vol. I, p. 234.

5 B. Reinert, Die Lehre vom tawakkul in der Massischen Sufik (Berlin, 1968), p. 188; van Ess,
Theologie, vol. I, pp. 228 9.

6 G. Bowering, The mystical vision of existence in classical Islam (Berlin, 1980), pp. 145 65.

tenets manifested themselves in the lives and intellectual legacy of those whom later Sufi literature portrayed, anachronistically, as the first Sufis.

The archetypal 'Sufis': al-Hasan al-Basri and his followers

The fame of the early preacher and scholar of Basra al Hasan al Basri (21 110/
642 728) rests on the unique uprightness of his personality, which made a
deep impression on his contemporaries. He was, above all, famous for his fiery
sermons in which he warned his fellow citizens against committing sins and
urged them to prepare themselves for the Last Judgement by leading pure and
frugal lives, as he did himself. Al Hasan invited his audience to abandon attachment to earthly possessions, which are of no use to either the living or
the dead. He judged sins stricdy, and considered the sinner to be fully responsible for his actions. Respectful of caliphal authority, despite its real
or perceived 'transgressions', he reserved the right to criticise it for what he
saw as its violation of the divinely ordained order of things. Al Hasan's brotherly feeling towards his contemporaries and his self abnegating altruism
(ithaf) were appropriated by later Sufis and formed the foundation of the code
of spiritual chivalry (futuwwa) which was embraced by Sufi associations in the
subsequent epochs.

Whether or not al Hasan was indeed the founding father of the Sufi move ment, as he was portrayed in later Sufi literature, his passionate preaching of
high moral and ethical standards won him numerous followers from a wide
variety of backgrounds professional Qur'an reciters and Qur'an copyists,

pious warriors (nussak mujahidun), small time traders, weavers and
scribes.
They embraced his spirited rejection of worldly delights and luxury, and
his
criticism of social injustices, oppressive rulers and their unscrupulous
retainers. Their actions and utterances exhibit their constant fear of
divine
retribution for the slightest moral lapse and their exaggerated sense of
sin,
which they sought to alleviate through constant penance, mortification of
the
flesh, permanent contrition and mourning. 7 This self effacing, God
fearing
attitude often found an outward expression in constant weeping, which
earned many early ascetics the name of 'weepers' (bakka'un). Already at
that
stage some of them were aware that their exemplary piety, moral
uprightness
and spiritual fervour placed them above the herd of ordinary believers,
who
were unable to overcome their simplest passions of the moment, not to

7 WakT ibn al Jarrah, Kitab al zuhd, vol. I, pp. 248 63.

64

Sufism

mention the complex moral dilemmas faced by God's elect folk. Hence
the
idea of 'friendship with', or proximity to', God (walaya), which the early
ascetics and mystics traced back to several Qur'anic phrases suggesting
the
existence of a category of God's servants enjoying his special favour in
this and
future life (e.g. Q 10:62; 18:65). It is in this narrow circle of early Muslim
ascetics that we witness the emergence of an elitist charismatic piety,
which
was gradually translated into superior moral authority and, eventually,
into a

substantial social force. At that early stage, however, its social ramifications
were rather limited. It was confined to a narrow circle of religious virtuosi,
whose search for personal salvation through constant meditation on their sins
and extraordinary ascetic feats was too individualistic to win them a broad
popular following. Nevertheless, the arduous sermonising and exemplary
uprightness of al Hasan and his disciples secured them relatively wide renown
among the population of Basra and Kufa. From there the practice of wearing
wool, and the style of piety that it symbolised, spread to Syria and Baghdad,
eventually giving the name to the ascetic and mystical movement that gained
momentum in the mid third/ninth century (see chart 2.1). Most of its repre
sentatives, including such important ones as Abd al Wahid ibn Zayd (d. c. 133/
750) and the famous female mystic Rabi'a al 'Adawiyya (d. 185/801), are
usually portrayed as spiritual descendants of al Hasan al Basri. The former is
said to be the founder of the first Sufi 'cloister' (duwayra) on the island of
Abbadan at the mouth of the Shatt al 'Arab, while Rabi'a distinguished herself
as an ardent proponent of 'pure' and 'disinterested' love of God to the
exclusion of all other religious emotions, including the love of the Prophet
and is commonly regarded as the founder of 'love mysticism' in Islam.

The nascent Sufi movement was internally diverse, and displayed a variety
of devotional styles: the 'erotic mysticism' of Rabi'a al 'Adawiyya existed
side by side with the stern piety of Ibrahim ibn Adham (d. 161/777) an
otherworldly recluse who renounced not only what was prohibited by Islamic
law but also much that it permitted. He, in turn, was distinct from both Ibn
al Mubarak (d. 181/797) an inner worldly 'warrior monk' from the
Byzantine Muslim frontier or Fudayl ibn 'Iyad (d. 187/803) a moderate
world renouncer and vocal critic of the rulers and scholarly 'establishment' of
his time, whom he accused of departing from the exemplary custom of the
Prophet and his first followers. Finally, in Shaqiq al Balkhi (d. 195/810), a
Khurasan! ascetic who was killed in action fighting against the 'pagan
Turks', we find a curious hybrid of Ibrahim ibn Adham and Ibn al

Mubarak both a holy warrior and an extreme ascetic who strove to avoid the corrupting influence of the world by completely withdrawing from it.

65

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Sufism

Shaqiq is often described as the earliest exponent, if not the founder, of
tawakkul a doctrine of complete trust in, and total reliance on, God, which
entailed absolute fatalism and the abandonment of any gainful employment.
He is also credited with early theorising about various levels or 'dwelling

stations' (manazil) of spiritual attainment, and can thus be viewed as one
of
the founders of the 'science of the mystical path' (Hbn al tana). The
reason why
individuals of so widely disparate temperaments and convictions ended
up in
the same classificatory category of 'early Sufis' should be sought in the
underlying ideological agendas of the creators of the Sufi tradition, which
will be discussed further on.

Some regional manifestations

In the eastern lands of the caliphate the ascendancy of Baghdad style
Sufism
was delayed by almost a century by the presence of local ascetic groups,
notably the Karramiyya of Khurasan and Transoxania and the
Malamatiyya of
Nishapur, whose leaders resisted the imposition of the 'foreign' style of
ascetic
piety. We know relatively little about the values and practices of these
groups,
which were suppressed by, or incorporated into, the Sufi movement
under the
Saljuqs. 9

In the western provinces of the caliphate we find a few ascetics who
studied
under al Hasan al Basri or his disciples, and who taught his ideas to their
own
students. The most notable of them were Abu Sulayman al DaranI (d.
215/830)
in Syria and Dhu '1 Nun al Misri (d. 245/860) in Egypt. The former
emphasised
complete reliance on God and unquestioning contentment with his will
(rida).
Any distraction from God, including marriage, was, for al DaranI,
unaccept
able. The amount of one's knowledge of God was in direct proportion to
one's
pious deeds, which al Darani described as an internal jihad and which he
valued more than the 'external' warfare against an 'infidel' enemy. In
Egypt
the most distinguished representative of the local ascetic and mystical
move
ment was Dhu '1 Nun al Misri, a Nubian whose involuntary stay in
Baghdad

on charges of heresy had a profound impact on the local ascetics and mystics.
His poetic utterances brim with the erotic symbolism that was to become so
prominent in later Sufi poetry. They depict God as the mystic's intimate friend
(anls) and beloved (habib). God, in turn, grants his faithful lover a special,

8 Reinert, Die Lehre, pp. 172 5.

9 J. Chabbi, 'Reflexions sur le soufisme iranien primitif , Journal Asiatique, 266, 1 2 (1978);
B. Radtke, 'Theologen und Mystiker in Hurasan und Transoxanien', ZDMG, 136, 1 (1986).

67

The New Cambridge History of Islam

intuitive knowledge of himself, which Dhu '1 Nun called 'gnosis' (ma'rifa). This esoteric knowledge sets its possessors, God's elect friends (awliya 1), apart
from the generality of the believers.

The activities and teachings of ascetics and mystics who resided in the caliphate's provinces indicate that the primeval ascetic and mystical move
ment was not confined to Iraq. However, it was in Iraq more precisely, in Baghdad that it came to fruition as a free standing and distinct trend within
Islam.

The formation of the Baghdadi tradition

The ascetic and mystical school of Baghdad the capital of the Abbasid empire established shortly after the fall of the Umayyads inherited the ideas and practices of the early Muslim devotees residing in the first Muslim

cities of Iraq: Basra and Kufa. However, the beginnings of the Baghdad school
proper are associated with a few individuals who came to serve as the principal
source of identity to its later followers. One of them was Ma'ruf al Karkhi
(d. 200/815), who studied under some prominent members of al Hasan
al Basri's inner circle (see chart 2.2). He established himself as an eloquent
preacher who admonished his audience to practise abstention and content
ment with God's decree from the pulpit of his own mosque in the Karkh
quarter of Baghdad. Al Karkhi took little interest in theological speculation,
and enjoined deeds, not words. Legends describe his numerous miracles, and
emphasise in particular the efficacy of his prayers. After his death his tomb on
the Tigris became a site of pious visits and supplicatory prayers. Equally
important for the self identity of the Baghdad school of Sufism is Bishr ibn
al Harith (al Hafi, 'the Barefoot', d. 227/842). He started his career as a jurist
and hadith collector, but later relinquished his studies and embarked on the life
of a pauper, because he realised that formal religious knowledge was irrelev
ant to the all important goal of salvation. We find a similar career trajectory in
the case of another founding father of the Baghdadi school, a learned mer
chant named Sari al Saqati (d. 253/867). His transformation from well to do
merchant and hadith collector to indigent Sufi occurred under the influence of
Ma'ruf al Karkhi's passionate sermons. Like Bishr, he considered the collec
tion of Prophetic reports, especially when it became a profession, to be 'no
provision for the Hereafter'. Of the practical virtues required of every believer
he emphasised fortitude in adversity, humility, trust in God and absolute
sincerity (ikhlas), and warned against complacency, vainglory and hypocrisy
(riya 1). In this he was in agreement with another prominent ascetic scholar of

68

Abu Said al-Kharraz
(d.c. 286/899 or earlier)

Abu '1-Husayn al-Nuri ∎
(d. 295/907)

I

al-Hallaj

(d. 309/922),

and later 'ecstatic'/ 'drunken' Sufis:

al-Kharaqani

(d. 417/1026),

Baqli

(d. 600/1209),

both Iran, and others

Sufism

Ma'riif al-Karkhi
(d.c. 200/815)

Bishr al-Hafi

(d. 227/842)

Sari al-Saqati

(d. 253/867)

al-Junayd

(d. 298/910),

and his circle:
al-Jurayri

(d. 312/924),

- 'Amr al-Makki

(d. after 291/903)

and others

- al-Shibli
(d. 334/946)

al-Harith al-Muhasibi
(d. 243/857)

al-Nasrabadhi
(d. 372/982)

al-Daqqaq

(d. 405/1014),
Khurasan

al-Qushayri

(d. 465/1075),

Khurasan

and later tarxqa Sufism

Chart 2.2 Sufism of the Baghdad school

that age, al Harith al Muhasibi (d. 243/857). Unlike the individuals just men
tioned, al Muhasibi was a prolific writer, whose written legacy reflects his
intense and occasionally tortuous quest for truth, purity of thought and deed
and, eventually, salvation. His emphasis on introspection as a means
of bringing out the true motives of one's behaviour earned him the nickname
'al Muhasibi', or 'one who takes account of oneself . By scrupulously examin
ing the genuine motives of one's actions, argued al Muhasibi, one can detect
and eliminate the traces of riya' that may adhere to them. Although

The New Cambridge History of Islam

al Muhasibi' s 'theorising' about mystical experience and theological issues
was spurned by some of his Sufi contemporaries, there is little doubt
that it contributed in significant ways to the formation of 'Sufi science'
(Him al tasawwuf). Moreover, the paternal nephew and successor of Sari
al Saqati as the doyen of the Baghdadi Sufis, Abu '1 Qasim aljunayd (d. 298/
910), cultivated a close friendship with al Muhasibi and was influenced by his
ideas.

Later Sufi literature portrays aljunayd as the greatest representative of

Baghdad Sufism, who embodied the 'sober' strain within it, as opposed to the
'intoxicated' one of Abu Yazid al Bistami, al Hallaj, al Shibli and their like.
Like al Muhasibi, aljunayd combined scholarly pursuits with 'mystical sci
ence', and presented himself as either a scholar or a Sufi, or both. He was
convinced that the most daring aspects of 'Sufi science' should be protected
from outsiders who had not tasted it themselves. Hence his 'profoundly
subtle, meditated language' that 'formed the nucleus of all subsequent elab
oration'. 10 A popular spiritual master, he wrote numerous episdes to his
disciples as well as short treatises on mystical themes. Couched in recondite
imagery and arcane terminology, his teaching reiterates the theme, first
clearly reasoned by him, that, since all things have their origin in God, they
are to be reabsorbed, after their dispersion in the empirical universe (tafriq),
into him (jam'). On the level of personal experience, this dynamic of the
divine reabsorption/ dispersion is reflected in the state of 'passing away' of the
human self (fand') in the contemplation of the oneness of God, followed by its
return to the multiplicity of the world and life in God (baqa'). As a result of
this experiential 'journey' the mystic acquires a new, superior awareness of
both God and his creation that cannot be obtained by means of either
traditional or speculative cognition. Unlike the 'intoxicated' Sufis, who con
sidered fand' to be the ultimate goal of the mystic, aljunayd viewed it as an
intermediate (and imperfect) stage of spiritual attainment. On the social
plane, aljunayd preached responsibility and advised his followers against
violating social conventions and public decorum. The accomplished mystic
should keep his unitive experiences to himself, and share them only with
those who have themselves 'tasted' them. He is said to have disavowed his
erstwhile disciple al Hallaj for making public his ecstatic encounters with
the divine reality. Al Junayd's eminence as a great, if not the greatest, master
of the 'classical age' of Sufism is attested by the fact that he figures in the
spiritual pedigree of practically every Sufi brotherhood. His awesome stature

10 Arberry, Sufism, pp. 56 7.

Sufism

sometimes overshadows some of his contemporaries, whose contribution to
the growth of the Sufi teaching was at least as important as his.

One such contemporary was Abu Sa c id al Kharraz (d. c. 286/899), who was
probably the first Sufi along with al Tirmidhi al Hakim (d. 310/910) to
discuss the relationship between the prophets (anbiya') and the (Sufi) 'friends
of God' (awliya 1). Al Kharraz argued that the prophetic missions of the former
and the 'sainthood' (wilaya) of the latter represent two distinctive if comple
mentary types of relationship between God and his creatures. Whereas the
anbiya' are entrusted by God with spreading and enforcing the divine law, the
awliyu' are absorbed in the contemplation of divine beauty and majesty and
become oblivious of the world around them. The two thus represent respec
tively the outward (zahif) and the inward (batiri) aspects of the divine revela
tion, and their missions are equally valid in the eyes of God. 11

Several individuals in aljunayd's entourage form a distinct group due to
their shared single minded focus on love of God. One of them was Abu
'1 Husayn al Nuri (d. 295/907), an associate of both al Junayd and al Kharraz.
Unlike his teachers, he shunned any theoretical discussion of the nature of
mystical experience, and defined Sufism as 'the abandonment of all pleasures
of the carnal soul'. In expressing his intense passion for the divine beloved al

Nuri frequently availed himself of erotic imagery, which drew upon him the
ire of some learned members of the caliph's entourage, who charged him and
his followers with blasphemy, and even attempted to have them executed.
Characteristically, in that episode al Junayd is said to have avoided arrest by
claiming to be a mere 'jurist' (faqih).

A similar ecstatic type of mysticism was espoused by al Shibli, whose
unbridled longing for God expressed itself in bizarre behaviour and scandal
ous public utterances. He indulged in all manner of eccentricities: burning
precious aromatic substances under the tail of his donkey, tearing up expen
sive garments, tossing gold coins into the crowds and speaking openly of his
identity with the divine, etc. 12 Faced with the prospect of prosecution on
charges of heresy, he affected madness.

Our description of the Baghdad school would be incomplete without a
mention of al Hallaj, whose ecstatic mysticism bears a close resemblance to
that of al Nuri and al Shibli, but who, unlike them, paid with his life for his
intoxication with divine love. His trial and public execution in Baghdad in 309/

P. Nwyia, Exegese coranique et langage mystique (Paris, 1970), pp. 237 42.

R. Nicholson (ed.), Tfie Kitab al luma' fi '1 tasawwuf of Abu Nasr ... al Sarraj (Leiden and

London, 1914), pp. 398 406.

922 on charges of 'heresy' demonstrated the dramatic conflict between the
spirit of communal solidarity promoted by Sunni ^ulamd' and the individual
istic, at times asocial aspirations of lovelorn mystics a conflict al Junayd and
his 'sober' followers were so anxious to overcome. Al Hallaj's trial took place
against the background of political intrigues and struggle for power at the
caliph's court in Baghdad, into which he was drawn, perhaps unwittingly. His
public preaching of loving union between man and God was construed by
some religious and state officials as rabble rousing and sedition. On the other
hand, his behaviour violated the code of prudence and secrecy advocated by
the leaders of the capital's Sufi community, who followed in the footsteps of
al Junayd. Finally, al Hallaj was also accused of public miracle working (ifsha'
al karamat) with a view to attracting the masses to his message. This too
contradicted the ethos of 'sober' Sufism, which required that mystics conceal
supernatural powers granted to them by God. All this and perhaps also
jealousy of his popularity led to his disavowal and condemnation by his
fellow Sufis, including al Junayd and al Shibli. While the theme of the union of
the mystic lover with the divine beloved was not unique to al Hallaj, his
public preaching of it and his attempt to achieve it through voluntary martyr
dom were unprecedented and scandalous. Al Hallaj thus came to exemplify
the 'intoxicated' brand of mysticism associated, apart from him, with such
Persian mystics as Abu Yazid alBistaml (d. 261/875), Ibn Khafif (d. 371/982),
Muhammad al Dastani (d. 417/1026), alKharaqani (d. 425/1033) and Ruzbihan
alBaqli(d. 606/1209). I3

The age of al Junayd and al Hallaj was rich in charismatic and mystical
talent. Among their contemporaries Sahl al Tustari of Basra (d. 283/896)
deserves special mention. He and his followers represented a distinct strain

of Sufi piety that assigned a special role to the practice of 'recollection' of God
(dhikf) with a view to 'imprinting' his name in the enunciator's heart. After the
mystic has completely internalised dhikr, God begins to effect his own recol
lection in the heart of his faithful servant. This leads to a loving union between
the mystic and his Creator. Al Tustari's mystical commentary on the Qur'an,
which seeks to bring out its hidden, inner meanings, represents one of the
earliest samples of Sufi exegesis. 14

As mentioned, the Sufism of Iraq was not the only ascetic and mystical
movement within the confines of the caliphate. In the eastern provinces of the
'Abbasid empire it had to compete with its local versions, such as the

13 A. Knysh, Islamic mysticism: A short history (Leiden, 2000), pp. 68 82.
14 Bowering, Tfie mystical vision.

72

Sufism

Malamatiyya and the Karramiyya. The eventual ascendancy of Baghdad
Sufism has not yet found a satisfactory explanation. One reason for its success
may lie in 'the efficacy of its powerful synthesis of individualist and commu
nalist tendencies', which allowed it to 'disenfranchise' its rivals 'by sapping
them of their spiritual thrust and absorbing their institutional features'. 15 One
can also point out the role of powers that be in deliberately promoting
Baghdad! Sufism over its rivals, which eventually disappeared from the
historical scene. According to this view, the rulers of the age found the loosely

structured, urban, middle class Sufism to be more 'manageable' than the
lower class and largely rural Karramiyya or the secretive and
independent
Malamatiyya. 1 Finally, the fortunes of all these ascetic and mystical
move
ments may have been influenced by the fierce factional struggle between
the
Shafi'i Ash'ari and the Hanafi Maturidi parties in Khurasan, which helped
to
propel Sufism associated with the former to the forefront and to push its
opponents to the fringes of local societies. 17 Another possible reason is
that in
the aftermath of the execution of al Hallaj many Baghdadi Sufis migrated
to
the eastern lands of the caliphate, where they aggressively disseminated
the
teachings and practices of their school among local communities. This
process
was accompanied by the emergence in Khurasan and Transoxania of a
con
siderable body of apologetic Sufi literature which we shall discuss in the
next
section.

The systematisation of the Sufi tradition

The fourth/tenth and fifth/ eleventh centuries witnessed a rapid growth of
Sufi lore. It was classified and committed to writing by the Sufi writers
who
can be considered as the master architects of 'Sufi science' (see chart
2.3). They
discussed such issues as the exemplary behaviour of the great Sufi
masters of
old, Sufi terminology, the nature of saintly miracles, the rules of
companion
ship in Sufi communities, Sufi ritual practices etc. Such discussions were
accompanied by references to the authority of Sufism's 'founding
fathers',
including those whose lives almost surely pre dated its emergence as an
independent trend of piety in Islam. The Sufi writers pursued a clear
apolo
getic agenda to demonstrate the consistency of Sufi teachings and
practices
with the Sunni creed as laid down by the creators of Islamic legal theory
and

15 A. Karamustafa, God's unruly friends (Salt Lake City, 1994), p. 31.

16 Chabbi, 'Reflexions', passim.

17 Knysh, Islamic mysticism, p. 99.

73

The New Cambridge History of Islam

Abu Nasr al-Sarrsj
(d. 378/958).
Khurasan and Baghdad

Abu Bakr al-Kalabadhi
(d. after 380/WO).

Transoxania

Abu Abd al-Rahman al-Sulami

(d. 412/1021),

Khurasan

Abu Nu'aym sl-Isbahani

(d. 430/1038),
Khurdsdn

Abd al-Karim al-Qushayri

(d. 465/1072),

Khurasan

al-Hujwiri

(d. after 465/ 1073),

Afghanistan, India

Abd Allah al-Ansari

(±481/1089),

Afghanistan

Muhammad al-Ghazali

(±505/1111),

Khurasan, Baghdad, Syria

Kiutb al-tuma', the first extant Sufi manual

Kitab ai-ta'arruf ti-'ibn al-tasawwitf, a
compendium of the Sufi teachings of the
Baghdad School-
numerous treatises on various aspects of
'Sufi science*; the first extant collection of
Sufi biographies and the first Sufi wfsir

Hilyat al-ttwliya , massive collection of 'Sufi*
biographies that includes those of the pious
individuals of early Islam who are normally
not considered Sufis

al-RUila fVibit al-uiiawwuf, classical
manual of 'Sufi science* still in use among
Sufis

Kashf al-mahjub r the earliest known Sufi
treatise in Persian

numerous Sufi treatises and a massive
collection of Sufi biographies in Persian

Sfya' 'uli.ni atom, a definitive

synthesis of ascetic and mystical ideas and

ethos based on earlier Sufi literature

Chart 2.3 The systematisation of the Sufi tradition

theology. By availing themselves of quotations from the Qur'an and the surma
they endeavoured to prove that Suftsm had been part of Islam from its
inception, and that the Sufis were true heirs to the Prophet and his closest
Companions. In what follows we shall provide a brief survey of normative Sufi
literature of the period.

'I"he earliest surviving Sufi treatise, Kiiab al lutna'fi 'I LasawwufCThe book of
the essentials of Sufism), is the work of Abu. Nasr al Sarraj of Khurasan (d. 378/
988). He associated with the major members of al Junayd's circle in Baghdad
and the followers of al Tustarlin Basra. Al Sarraj" s goal was to demonstrate the
pre eminence of Sufis over all other men of religion, since they alone were
able to live up to the high standards of personal piety and worship enjoined by
the Muslim scripture. They thus constituted the spiritual 'elite' (al khdssa) of the
Muslim community to whom its ordinary members should turn for guidance.
Within this Sufi elite al Sarraj identified three categories: the beginners; the

74

Sufism

accomplished Sufi masters; and the 'cream of the cream' (khass al khawass) of
Sufism, or 'the people of the true realities' (ahl al haqaHq). Al Sarraj's work
represents an early attempt to categorise mystical experiences by placing them
in the prefabricated conceptual pigeonholes corresponding to the three levels
of spiritual attainment outlined above. It also tried to demarcate the limits of
Sufi 'orthodoxy' and to cleanse Sufism of perceived errors and excesses.

The work of Abu Talib al Makki, Qut al qulub (Nourishment for the
hearts), presents the teachings of the Basran school of piety associated
with al Tustari and his followers known as the Salimiyya. It is reminiscent
of a standard manual of religious jurisprudence in which meticulous dis
cussions of the mainstream Islamic rituals and articles of the Islamic creed
are interspersed with quintessential Sufi themes, such as the 'states' and
'stations' of the mystical path, the permissibility and nature of gainful
employment, pious self scrutiny etc. Like al Sarraj, Abu Talib confidendy
states that the Sufi teachings and practices reflect the authentic custom of
the Prophet and his Companions, 'transmitted by al Hasan al Basri and
maintained scrupulously intact by relays of [Sufi] teachers and disciples'. [1]
Abu Talib's work was highly influential. It formed the foundation of the
celebrated Ihya' l ulum al din (Revivification of religious sciences) of Abu
Hamid al Ghazali (d. 505/1111).

Another famous Sufi author of the age, Abu Bakr al Kalabadhi (d. 380/990 or
385/994) of Bukhara, produced the Sufi manual Kitab al ta^arrufli madhhab ahl
al tasawwuf (Introduction to the teaching of the Sufis). Despite the fact that it
originated in a region located far from Iraq, its author exhibits an intimate
knowledge of Iraqi Sufism and its major exponents. Like other advocates of
Sufism, he saw his main task in demonstrating Sufism's compliance with the
principles of Sunni Islam, as represented by both Hanafi and Shafri schools
of theology and law. Quoting the Sufi authorities of the Baghdad school,
al Kalabadhi meticulously described the principal 'stations' of the mystical

path: repentance, abstinence, patience, poverty, humility, fear, pious scrupulous

ness in word and deed, trust in God, contentment with one's earthly portion,

recollection of God's name, intimacy and nearness to God, love of God etc. 19

The most influential expositions of 'Sufi science' were composed by the Khurasan! Sufis Abu [Abd al Rahman al Sulami (d. 412/1021) and [Abd al KarTm

al Qushayri (d. 465/1072). The former also provided the earliest extant

18 Arberry, Sufism, p. 68.

19 Muhammad ibn Ibrahim al Kalabadhi, The doctrine of the Sufis: Kitab al ta'arruf
li madhhab ahl al tasawwuf by Muhammad Ibn Ibrahim al Kalabadhi, trans. A. Arberry
(Cambridge and New York, 1977) (repr.).

biographical account of earlier Sufi masters, entitled Tabaqat al sufiyya (Generations of the Sufis), and a collection of Sufi exegetical dicta. 2,0 Unlike
his predecessors, al Sulami was intimately familiar and sympathetic with the
Malamatiyya ascetic and mystical tradition of Khurasan and included refer
ences to its teachings in his Sufi tracts. Al Sulami' s intellectual legacy became
the foundation of all subsequent Sufi literature, including the celebrated al
Risala al Qushayriyya (Qushayrf s epistle [on Sufism]) by al Qushayri acknowledged as the most widely read and influential treatise on 'Sufi science'
that is still being studied in Sufi circles. After providing an account of Sufi
lives with obvious edifying intention al Qushayri presented the major

concepts and terms of the Sufism of his age, followed by a detailed account of
various Sufi practices, including listening to music during 'spiritual concerts'
(sama c), miracles of saints, rules of companionship and travel and, finally,
'spiritual advice' to Sufi novices (muridiin). Several other Sufi works were written around that time, including Hilyat al awliya 1 (Ornament of the friends
of God) a massive collection of Sufi biographies by Abu Nu'aym al Isbahani
(d. 430/1038); Kashf al mahjiib (The unveiling of the veiled) the first Sufi manual in Persian; and the numerous Sufi treatises of the Hanbali Sufi [Abd
Allah al Ansari (d. 481/1089) of Herat. Given the diversity of intellectual backgrounds and scholarly affiliations of these Sufis, their writings display a
surprising uniformity in that they refer to basically the same concepts, terms,
anecdotes, authorities and practices. This indicates that by the first half of the
fifth /eleventh century the Baghdadi/Iraqi Sufi tradition had already stabilised
and spread as far as Central Asia and the Caucasus. 21 These writings constitute
a concerted effort on the part of their authors to bring Sufism into the fold of
Sunni Islam by demonstrating its complete consistency with the teachings and
practices of Islam's 'pious ancestors' (al salaf). This tendency was brought to
fruition in the life and work of the celebrated Sunni theologian Abu Hamid
al Ghazali (d. 505/1111).

The maturity of 'Sufi science': al-Ghazali
the conciliator

A naturally gifted man, al Ghazali, originally from Iran, established himself as
the leading Sunni theologian and jurist of his day. After serving as a professor at

20 G. Bowering (ed.), Tfie minor Qufan commentary of Abu 'Abd al Rahman ... al Sulami

(d. 412/1021) (Beirut, 1995).

21 See e.g. A. K. Alikberov, Epokha klassicheskogo islama na Kavkaze (Moscow, 2003).

Sufism

the prestigious Nizamiyya religious college (madrasa) in Baghdad, he was
suddenly afflicted with a nervous illness (488/1095) and withdrew from public
life into an eleven year spiritual retreat during which he composed a succession
of books including his greatest masterpiece, Ihya 1 L ulum al dm (The revivification
of religious sciences), and his autobiography, alMunqidh min aldalal
(Deliverance from error). The latter provides a poignant account of his difficult
quest for truth and serenity. Upon examining the most influential systems of
thought current in his epoch (speculative theology, the messianic teachings of
Isma'ilism and Hellenistic philosophy) al Ghazali arrived at the idea of the
superiority of mystical 'unveiling 1 over all other types of cognition. He argued
that Sufi morals and spiritual discipline were indispensable in delivering the
believer from doubt and self conceit and in instilling in him intellectual serenity,
which, in turn, would lead him to salvation. 2,2 The concrete ways to achieve this
serenity and salvation are detailed in the Ihya' a synthesis and amplification of
the ascetic and mystical concepts and ethos outlined in the classical Sufi works
enumerated above (see chart 2.3). This book was intended to serve as a
comprehensive guide for the devout Muslim to every aspect of religious life

from daily worship to the purification of the heart and advancement along the
mystical path. Addressed to the general audience, it highlighted the practical
moral and ethical aspects of Sufism, which al Ghazali presented as being in
perfect harmony with the precepts of mainstream Sunni Islam. The more
esoteric aspects of his thought came to the fore in his Mishkat al anwar (Niche
for the lights) an extended commentary on the 'Light verse' of the Qur'an
(Q 24:35) in which al Ghazali identified the God of the Qur'an with the light of
truth and existence, revealing his kinship with the controversial philosophy of
Ibn STna. 23 Al Ghazali' s 'illuminationist' metaphysics and mystical psychology
received further elaboration in the work of later thinkers, especially Shihab
al Din Yahya al Suhrawardi (d. 597/1191) and Ibn al 'Arab! (d. 638/1240).

Al Ghazali undoubtedly performed a great service for devout Muslims of
every level of education by presenting obedience to the prescriptions of the
shar7a as a sure and meaningful way to salvation. His Sufi lodge (khanqah) at
Tus (near present day Mashhad), where he retired towards the end of his life
and where he and his disciples lived together, can be seen as an attempt to
implement his pious precepts in real life. To what extent al Ghazali can be
considered the ultimate 'conciliator' between mainstream Sunnism and

22 W. M. Watt, Faith and practice ofal Ghazali (London, 1953), passim.

23 H. Landolt, 'al Ghazali and Religionswissenschaft', Asiatische Studien, 55, 1 (1991), p. 54;
cf. M. Hodgson, The venture of Islam, 3 vols. (Chicago, 1974), vol. II, p. 314; P. Heath,
Allegory and philosophy in Avicenna (Ibn Sina) (Philadelphia, 1992), passim.

The New Cambridge History of Islam

Sufism is difficult to ascertain. His relative success in this regard may be attributed more to his imposing reputation as a Sunrii scholar 'who com manded the respect of all but the narrowest of the orthodox' 24 rather than to
his innovative interpretation of the Sufi tradition. Nevertheless, there is little
doubt that his enthusiastic advocacy for Sufi morals and ethics were of critical
importance in making Sufism a respectable option for both Sunni 'ulama' and
the masses.

Al Ghazali's versatility aptly reflects the complexity and sophistication of Islamic culture, in which Sufism was playing an increasingly important role.
He was instrumental in fusing elements of various Islamic teachings and practices into a comprehensive world view that formed the ideological foun
dation of the nascent Sufi 'orders'.

Sufism as literature

Although the goals of poetic expression and mystical experience would seem
to be quite distinct (self assertion as opposed to self annihilation in the divine,
or a silent contemplation of God as opposed to a creative verbalisation of personal sentiment), under certain conditions they may become complemen
tary, if not identical. Their affinity springs from their common use of symbol
and parable as a means to convey subtle experiences that elude conceptualisa
tion in a rational discourse, which by its very nature requires lucidity and a
rigid, invariable relation between the signifier and the signified. In the same
way as poetical vision cannot be captured by a cut and dried rational discourse, mystical experience avoids being reduced to a sum total of concrete
and non contradictory statements. Both poetry and mystical experience carry

emotional, rather than factual, content; both depend, in great part, on a stream
of subtle associations for their effect. It is therefore little wonder that mystical
experience is often bound intimately with poetic expression. Both the poetry
and the experience are couched in the formative symbols of the poet mystic's
religious tradition and shaped by the totality of his personal predisposition and
intellectual environment.

This being the case, it is only natural, then, for mystical experience to be
bound intimately with poetic inspiration and, consequently, poetic expression.
It is with these general considerations in mind that we should approach the
work of Sufism's greatest poets, Farid al Din 'Attar (d. between 586/1190 and
627/1230), Jalal al Din Rumi (d. 672/1273) and Jam! (d. 898/1492).

24 Arberry, Sufism, p. 83.

Sufism

Farid al Din 'Attar of NTshapur is often seen as the greatest mystical poet of
Iran after Jalal al Din Rumi, who learned much from him. The genre of his
most important writings is the couplet poem (mathnawT), which was to
become a trademark of Persian mystical poetry from then on. 'Attar's
mathnawl usually tell a single frame story which, in the course of the narrative,
is embellished by numerous incidental stories and by various narrative
vignettes. 25 His more esoteric poems are inward looking and visionary in
character; they show little interest in the events of the external world. Here
a few principal ideas are pursued with intensity and great emotion, and

couched in intricate parables. Among such recurring ideas are: the ecstatic
annihilation of the mystic in God (fancf); the underlying unity of all being
(there is nothing other than God, and all things are derived from and return to
him); the knowledge of the mystic's own self which gives him the key to the
vital mysteries of God and of the universe; the indispensability of the Sufi
master (shaykh) for the spiritual progress of his disciple (murid) etc. Attar's
works are full of allusions to Sufi gnosis (ma'rifa), which the author presents as
superior to all other types of cognition. He avails himself freely of the sayings
and stories of earlier Sufi masters, among whom he is particularly fascinated
by al Hallaj.

Of 'Attar's prose writing special mention should be made of his Tadhkirat
al awliya' (Memorial of the saints) a collection of anecdotes about, and
sayings of, the great Muslim mystics before his time. Here 'Attar's literary
propensities take precedence over his concern for historical accuracy: he freely
embellishes the dry, factual accounts of the older Sufi biographers with
fanciful details, marvels and legends. While such additions definitely make
'Attar's Sufi biographies unreliable as sources of historical data, they tell us a
great deal about the author's intellectual preferences and religious views as
well as his vision of the ideal Sufi master. 2.

The family of Jalal al Din Rumi, whom his followers often call 'Our Master'
(mawlana), migrated from Balkh (present day Afghanistan) to Konya
(Anatolia) on the eve of the Mongol invasions. A turning point in his life
was the arrival in Konya in 642/1244 of a wandering dervish nicknamed
Shams i Tabriz 'a wildly unpredictable man who defied all conventions
and preached the self sufficiency of each individual in his search for the
divine'. 27 In Shams i Tabriz, Rumi found his muse and symbol of ultimate

25 Hodgson, The venture of Islam, vol. II, p. 305.

26 Farid al Din 'Attar, Muslim saints and mystics: Episodes from the Tadhkirat al awliya' by
Farid al Din 'Attar, trans. A. Arberry (London and New York, 1990) (repr.).

beauty in which he discovered the genuine meaning of his life. Rumi's love for
Shams i Tabriz transformed him from an ordinary mortal into a divinely
inspired poet of great stature. Upon Shams's tragic death Rumi suffered a
deep psychological crisis, which he tried to overcome by composing poems
and participating in Sufi concerts and dances in the hope of finding his friend in
his own soul. The real history of the Sufi order founded by Rumi (which came
to be known as the Mawlawiyya (or Mevleviyya) after Rumi's honorific title)
began with his son Sultan Walad (Veled; d. 712/1312), whose able leadership
secured it high prestige and wide acceptance among the Muslims of Anatolia.
Although originally recruited from among the craftsmen, the order gradually
won over many members of the Anatolian upper class. The distinctive feature
of the Mawlawiyya is the pre eminent role that its leaders assigned to music
and dancing. With time they were regularised, culminating in the famous
'whirling dance' ceremony. The Mawlawi dancing rituals reflect the joyous
and highly emotional world outlook characteristic of the founder and his
poetry.

Rumi saw himself as neither a philosopher nor a poet in the usual meaning
of these words. Rather, he comes across as a passionate lover of God,
unconcerned about societal conventions and religious stereotypes. At the

same time, he drew heavily on the Sufi tradition systematised by earlier Sufi
writers. He viewed all creatures as being irresistibly drawn to their maker in
the same way as trees rise from the dark soil and extend their branches and
leaves towards the sun. Their aspiration reaches its climax in their mystical
annihilation in the divine essence (fana'), which, however, is never complete.
As the flame of a candle continues to exist despite being outshone by the
radiance of the sun, so does the mystic retain his individuality in the over
powering presence of his Lord. In this state he is both human and divine, and
may be tempted to declare his complete identification with God. Due to the
intensely personal and 'ecstatic' character of Rumi's poetic work, it found
practically no successful imitators in later Persian poetry. In Rumi we find a
paragon of Sufi artistic creativity, who harmoniously combined mystical
experience with poetic inspiration.

Abd al Rahman JamI came from the district of Jam near Herat in present day
Afghanistan. As a youth he developed a deep passion for mysticism and decided
to embark on the mystical path. His first spiritual director was Sa c d al Din
Muhammad Kashghari, a foremost disciple of and the organisational successor
to the founder of the Naqshbandiyya, Baha 1 al Din Naqshband (d. 791/1389).
Later on, JamI made friends with another influential Naqshbandl leader, 'Ubayd
Allah Ahrar (d. 896/1490), whom he admired and whom he mentioned

80

Sufism

frequently in his poetical works. 2 He spent most of his life in Herat under the
patronage of the Timurid sultan Husayn Bayqara, dividing his time between
religious studies, poetry and mystical meditation.

Jami's written legacy in Persian and Arabic includes a giant biographical
history of Sufism, Nafahat al uns (The breaths of divine intimacy), which draws
on 'Attar's Tadhkirat al awliya' and the works of earlier Sufi biographers. Jami's
Arabic treatises on various difficult aspects of Sufi philosophy are masterpieces
of lucidity and concision. They reveal his deep indebtedness to Ibn al 'Arab!
and his philosophically minded followers, whose recondite mystical ideas and
terminology he sought to make accessible to a less sophisticated audience. His
writings intricately mingle mystical poetry with didactic, biographical and
metaphysical narratives, providing a helpful summation of various strands of
Sufism in his age.

Sufism as metaphysics: the impact of Ibn al- c Arabi

As mentioned, Jarnl was profoundly influenced by Ibn al ArabI (d. 638/1240). In
this he was not alone there was hardly a mystical thinker in that age or later who
was not. Although Ibn al Arab! spent the first half of his life in al Andalus and the
Maghrib, his talents came to full bloom in the east, where he composed most of
his famous works especially his controversial masterpieces Fusus al hikam (Bezels
of wisdom) and al Futuhat al makkiyya (Meccan revelations) and trained his most
consequential disciple, Sadr al Din al QunawT (d. 673/1274), who spread his ideas
among the Persian speaking scholars of Anatolia and beyond. 29

Ibn al Arabi' s legacy consists, in his own estimation, of some 250 300 works,
although some modern scholars credit him with twice this number of writings. 30

Nowhere in these works did Ibn al 'ArabI provide a succinct and final account of
his basic tenets. On the contrary, he seems to have been deliberately elusive in
presenting his principal ideas, and took great care to offset them with numerous
disclaimers. In conveying to the reader his personal mystical insights, Ibn al 'Arabi made skilful use of 'symbolic images that evoke emergent associations
rather than fixed propositions'. 31 Although familiar with the syllogistic reasoning

28 N. Heer (ed.), The precious pearl: al Jami's al Durrah al fakhirah (Albany, 1979), pp. 1 2.

29 H. Corbin, Creative imagination in the Sufism of Ibn 'Arabi (Princeton, 1969), pp. 69 71,
224; W. Chittick, 'Ibn 'Arab! and his school', in S. H. Nasr (ed.), Islamic spirituality:
Manifestations (New York, 1991); W. Chittick, 'Rumi and wahdat al wujud', in A. Banani,
R. Hovannisian et al. (eds.), Poetry and mysticism in Islam (Cambridge, 1994).

30 O. Yahia, Histoire et classification de Voeuvre d'Ibn 'Arabi, 2 vols. (Damascus, 1964).

31 Hodgson, The venture of Islam, vol. II, p. 224.

The New Cambridge History of Islam

of Muslim philosophers (faUisifa), he always emphasised that their method fell
short of capturing the dizzying dynamic of oneness/plurality that characterises
the relationship between God and human beings, human beings and the universe. To capture this complex dynamic Ibn al 'Arab! availed himself of

shocking antinomies and breathtaking paradoxes meant to awaken his readers
to what he regarded as the real state of the universe, namely, the underlying
oneness of all its elements. Oftentimes his discourses strike us as a mishmash of
seemingly disparate themes and motifs operating on parallel discursive levels
from exegesis to poetry and mythology to jurisprudence and speculative theol
ogy. Ibn al 'Arab! explored such controversial themes as the status of prophecy
vis a vis sainthood; the concept of the perfect man; the relations between the
human 'microcosm' and its cosmic counterpart; the ever changing divine
self manifestation in the events and phenomena of the empirical universe; the
different modes of the divine will; and the allegoric aspects of the scripture. He
addressed these issues in ways that were 'never really repeated or adequately
imitated by any subsequent Islamic author'. 32 The goal of this deliberately
devious discourse was to 'carry the reader outside the work itself into the life
and cosmos which it is attempting to interpret'. 33 His recondite narratives were
'meant to function as a sort of spiritual mirror, reflecting and revealing the inner
intentions, assumptions and predilections of each reader ... with profound
clarity'. 34 It is, therefore, hardly surprising that each Islamic century produced
new interpretations of his ideas.

This is not the place to detail Ibn al 'Arabi's complex metaphysical doctrine.
Suffice it to say that he viewed the world as a product of God's self reflection
that urged his unique and indivisible essence to reveal itself in the things and
phenomena of the material universe as in a mirror. This idea scandalised many
medieval 'ulama\ who accused him of admitting the substantial identity of
God and the world:

a concept that contravened the doctrine of divine transcendence so central to
Islamic theology. In Ibn 'Arabi's system, God was not the absolutely other

worldly and impregnable entity of mainstream Muslim theologians.
Consequently, many of the latter condemned him as the founder of the
heretical doctrine of oneness of being (wahdat al wujud) understood as
pan
theism pure and simple. 35

32 J. Morris, 'How to study the Futuhat', in S. Hirtenstein and M. Tiernan
(eds.), Muhyiddin
Ibn 'Arabl: A commemorative volume (Brisbane, 1993).

33 Hodgson, The venture of Islam, vol. II, p. 315.

34 Morris, 'How to study the Futuhaf, p. 73.

35 A. Knysh, Ibn 'Arabl in the later Islamic tradition: The making of a
polemical image in medieval
Islam (Albany, 1999), p. 14.

Hi

Sufism

Major intellectual and practical trends in later Sufism

Al Ghazali and Ibn al Arabi's complex synthesis of Sufi moral and ethical
teaching, theosophy, Neoplatonic metaphysics, gnosticism and
mainstream
Sunnism aptly captures the astounding diversity of post classical Sufism.
This
diversity allowed it to effectively meet the intellectual and spiritual needs
of a
broad variety of potential constituencies from a pious merchant or
craftsman
in the bazaar to a refined scholar at the ruler's court. Contrary to a
commonly
held assumption, such philosophical and metaphysical systems were not
'foreign implants' grafted onto the pristine body of classical Sufism.
Rather,
they were a natural outgrowth of certain tendencies inherent in Sufism
from

its outset. Early Sufi masters had viewed God as the only real agent in this
world, to whose will and action man should submit unconditionally. In the
fifth sixth/ eleventh twelfth centuries this idea evolved probably not with
out the influence of Avicennan ontology into a vision of God not just as the
only agent but also the only essence possessing real and unconditional
existence. This vision, which may loosely be defined as 'monistic', was
rebuffed by the great Hanbali scholar Ibn Taymiyya (d. 728/1328), who
condemned its followers as heretical 'unificationists' (al ittihadiyya) bent on
undermining divine transcendence and blurring the all important borderline
between God and his creatures. A fierce polemic between the champions of
Ibn al 'Arab! and his detractors ensued that has not yet quite subsided. It has
divided Muslim divines into two warring factions, one of which praised Ibn
al 'Arab! as the greatest 'saint' (waU) and divine 'gnostic' Carif) of all ages,
while the other condemned him as a dangerous heretic who undermined the
very foundations of Islamic faith. 36

In addition to monistic metaphysics, the post Ghazalian period of Sufism's
history witnessed the institutionalisation of a number of distinctively Sufi
rituals and meditation techniques, including retreat (khalwa), collective recol
lection of God (dhikf) and ritualised 'listening' to music and mystical poetry
(sama 1). These practices served as a means to intensify the relationship
between the mystics and God, and to open the former to the outpourings of
divine grace. During samxC sessions music was played and mystical poetry
recited in order to induce in the audience a state of ecstasy (wajd) which often
resulted in a spontaneous dance or frantic rhythmical movements. Thanks
to samxC mystics could achieve changed states of consciousness, during

36 Ibid., p. 272.

The New Cambridge History of Islam

which they had visionary or cognitive experiences known as 'unveilings' (mukashafat).

The 'sober' strain of Sufi piety which drew its inspiration from al Junayd and his circle tried to purge Sufism of ecstatic, uncontrollable elements and
re emphasise its moral and ethical aspects as the surest way to God. It found an
eloquent exponent in the famous Baghdad preacher Abd al Qadir al JTlam
(d. 561 / 1166) a typical representative of community oriented mysticism. This
sober, socially responsible brand of mystical piety received a further author
itative articulation in the influential Sufi manual entitled 'Awarif al ma'arif
(Gifts of divine knowledge) of Shihab al Din 'Umar al Suhrawardi of Baghdad
(d. 635/1234). A Persian translation and adaptation of this seminal work, which
was made in the ninth/fifteenth century, has served as a standard textbook for
Persian speaking mystics ever since.

The rise and spread of the tariqas

From the sixth/twelfth century onward mystical life was increasingly culti
vated in Sufi associations or orders (turiiq; sing, tariqa), some of which have
survived down to the present. Taking their origin in relatively small lodges
(zawiya; khanqah), Sufi institutions gradually acquired freestanding complexes
of buildings where their members engaged in collective and individual wor
ship undisturbed by the hustle and bustle of everyday life. The conduct of the
members of such Sufi communities was governed by fixed rules enforced by a

hierarchical Sufi leadership. While in the fourth fifth/tenth eleventh centur
ies the teacher disciple relationship was relatively informal, with the disciple
(murld) being free to study under several different masters (shuyukh; sing.
shaykh), in the Sufi orders it was formalised and strictly regimented. The head
of a Sufi tariqa was capable of supporting his often numerous disciples from
the endowments and pious donations provided by the rulers, blessing seeking
nobility, wealthy merchants and members of the military elite. In return, he
demanded undivided loyalty of his adherents. The training technique of an
individual Sufi master came to be known as his way' or 'method' (tang).
Metonymically it came to be applied to the entire Sufi community which he
had founded, and which usually assumed his name. The headship of some
orders was hereditary; in others the successor was elected from a pool of
eligible candidates. After the novice had completed his training under the
guidance of a Sufi master, he obtained from him a licence (ijaza) to instruct his
own disciples in accordance with the master's spiritual 'method'. His new
status as an independent Sufi was symbolised by the ritual bestowal either

Sufism

public or private of a Sufi robe (khirqa) upon the graduate. In addition to the
khirqa or the patched cloak (muraqqa^), the typical Sufi outfit also included a
prayer rug (sajjada), a rosary (misbaha) and a beggar's bowl (kashkul). With
time, each Sufi order acquired a distinctive dress code and colours that set
them apart from the members of other Sufi communities. 37

The major early tariqas the Qadiriyya, Rifa'iyya, Suhrawardiyya,
Chishtiyya, Kubrawiyya, Naqshbandiyya and Shadhiliyya were formed in

the seventh ninth/thirteenth fifteenth centuries (see charts 2.4, 2.5 and 2.6).

Each of them had its own character and was initially associated with a particular geographical region. Thus the Qadiriyya, which originated in Baghdad, gradually spread across the entire Muslim world from the Maghrib to India and Indonesia and as far as China. Likewise, the Naqshbandiyya, founded in Central Asia, thrived in India, where it became probably the most influential and well organised Sufi community. Later on it extended its reach to the Caucasus, the Volga basin, the Arab lands and even North Africa. The Shadhiliyya emerged in the Maghrib, thrived in Egypt and then spread to Yemen and Indonesia. Despite their international outreach, these and other orders were, for the most part, decentralised, and their regional branches had little in common except for a shared initiatic line and set of litanies, dhikr formulas and ritual requirements, all of which were usually traced back to the eponymous founder. The political and social roles of the turuq varied dramatically in time and space, and were usually deter mined by the personalities of their leaders and the concrete historical circum stances of their existence. It is very difficult, therefore, to make any generalisations about any given Sufi order. Nevertheless, such generalisations abound in both popular imagination and literary sources. Thus, the Qadiriyya is famous for its emphasis on the role of its founder, who is believed to maintain his guiding and protective presence among his followers in all epochs and locations. Apart from this belief, however, its regional branches had little in common. The 'loud', energetic dhikr and exotic dance of Qadiri dervishes are often contrasted with the 'silent' dhikr and restraint of the Naqshbandiyya, which is considered to be more 'sober' and 'sharfa abiding'. The Rifa'iyya with its 'howling' dhikr and spectacular public performances that involve walking on live coals, eating glass and the piercing of the flesh by its murids (to demonstrate the spiritual power of their masters) is viewed as 'ecstatic' and 'libertine'. Similar generalisations are often made about the orders' stance

vis a vis the powers that be the Naqshbandiyya being regarded as prone to

37 See e.g. John Brown, The darvishes or oriental mysticism, ed. H. A. Rose (London, 1968).

cooperate with or manipulate them, in contrast to the more standoffish and
independent attitude of the Chishtiyya and the Shadhiliyya. However, as
mentioned, a single order could behave differently under different leaders
and in different historical conditions. 38 Each order derived its distinct identity
from the following denning rules and characteristics:

i. The order's 'spiritual chain' (silsila), which was traced back from its con
temporary head to the Prophet Muhammad. It may have thirty to forty
'rungs'. This 'chain' served as the major source of legitimacy for the tarlqa
leader and of pride and self identity for his followers.

2. The conditions and rituals for admission into the order. Some orders took
men and women, some only men. The novice (tnurid) owed the shaykh
unconditional obedience and was required to seek his advice and instruc
tion on all matters of worship and personal life. Initiation rituals differed
from one order to another, but were, as a rule, reminiscent of those
practised in artisan guilds, with which the orders were often closely
connected.

3. Instructions about the performance and formulas of dhikr, which were
peculiar to every tarlqa, and which also gave it a distinct identity. They
stipulate the regulation of breathing, the rhythm and frequency with which
these formulas must be recited, allow or disallow use of music and dance
etc.

4. Instructions regarding the terms and conditions of retreat or seclusion (khalwa), the voluntary withdrawal from communal life by the order's members to devote themselves to pious meditation, self reflection and dhikr.

5. Rules of fellowship and communal life, which regulated relations among
the members of a given Sufi community and between the shaykh and his followers.

Unlike the sophisticated metaphysical theories discussed above, which were confined to the Sufi intellectual elite, or even deliberately concealed by them from the rank and file, knowledge of the normative literature of the
order was required of all its literate members. The illiterate ones learned them
in the course of oral instruction by the shaykh of the order or his deputies.

Sufism and the cult of saints

Already during their lifetimes some prominent Sufi masters and heads of Sufi
orders were treated as 'God's (elect) friends' or 'saints' (awliya') by both their

38 Knysh, Islamic mysticism, chaps. 8 and 9.

86

al-Junayd

(d. 297/910),

Baghdad

Abu '1-Naj[b al-Suhrawardi

(d. 56}/ 1168),

Baghdad

I

Ammar al-Bidlisi
(d. £18/1221),
Anatolia, Iran

'Umar al-Suhrawardi

(d. 632/1234),

Baghdad

[al-]Suhrawardiyya order

1

al-Zanjani

(no dates)
Iran

Najm al-Din Rubra
(d. 618/1221),
Transoxania

Kubrawiyya Order

[al-]Jamaliyya,
Iran

|al-J Buzghushiyya,
Skiraz

[al-JZayniyya,

Anatolia

1

[al-] Burhaniyya /

[al-]Dasuqiyya.

Egypt

I 1 1 1

[al] Mawlawiyya, [al-]Dhahabiyya, [al] Nurbakhshiyya, [al] Firdawsiyya, Anatolia Iran Iran India

1

[al-] Suhrawardiyya/

Chishtiyya,

India

'Umaral-Khalwati
(d. c 800/1397);
Yahya Shirwani

(d. 869/1464),

fran and Azerbaijan

[al-JKhalwatiyya order and its branches in

Anatolia, SaVtans and Middle East

Chart 2.4 Sufi orders (al Suhrawardiyya, al Kubrawiyya and al Kharwatiyya)

The New Cambridge History of Islam

al-Junayd

(d. 297/910),

Abu Madyan

(d. 594 /1197),
Algeria

Ibn Mashish

(d. 625/1228),

Morocco

al-Shadhili

(d. 656/1258),

Maghrib and Egypt

I
al-Jazuli

(d. 869/1465),

Morocco

al-Jazuliyya order

and its branches:

Hansaliyya, Tayyibiyya,

'Isawa, etc.
Algeria, Morocco, Tunis

Abu '1- Abbas al-Mursi

(d. 686/1287),

E sypt

Ibn Ata al-Iskandari

(d. 709/1309),

Egypt

1

Ibrahim al-Dasuqi

(d. 833/1429),

Syria

al-Dasuqiyya order,

Egypt and Syria

al-Wafa iyya, al-Arusiyya, al-Hanafiyya, al-Rashidiyya,
al-Darqawa, etc.,
Egypt and Maghrib

Chart 2.5 The Madaniyya/Shadhiliyya of the Maghrib and Egypt

followers and the local populations not directly affiliated with any Sufi
community. Their elevated spiritual status and lack of self centred
impulses
were seen by the populace as signs of their special standing in the eyes
of God.
Due to their intimate knowledge of human psychology, which they
acquired
through training their disciples, and their special position in society, they
often
assumed the role of arbitrators in conflicts between different social and
kinship
groups and between rulers and their subjects. Their mediatory functions
further elevated their stature in the eyes of the masses, who came to
credit
them with supernatural knowledge and perspicacity and, eventually, the
ability to work miracles (karatnat). The revered status of the awliyd 1
usually
did not cease after their death their tombs often became objects of pious

Sufism

al-Junayd

(d. 297/910),

Abd al-Karim al-Qushayri

(d. 465/1072),

Khurasan

al-Farmadi

(d. 477/1084),

Khurasan

I

Abu Hamid al-Ghazali

(d. 505/1111),
Khurasan, Baghdad, Syria

Baha al-Din Naqshband ∎

(d. 791/1389),

Transoxania

Yusuf al-Hamadanl
(d. 535/1140),
Transoxania

Abd al-Khaliq Ghijduwam

(d. 575/1179),

Transoxania

Ahmad Sirhindi

(d 1034/1624),

India

Naqshbandiyya-Mujaddidiyya

Middle East, N. Africa, Yemen, Russia,

South and South-East Asia, East Turkistan

Chart 1.6 The Naqshbandiyya

visits, and even annual pilgrimages (ziyarat) accompanied by special ritual
activities. Visitors brought votive gifts to Sufi shrines and asked the Sufi
masters buried therein for blessing and intercession. Legends were circulated
about their miraculous interference in the lives of their followers during
their lifetimes and after their deaths. These were written down in nume
rous hagiographical collections that became part of Sufi literature. Devotional
activities associated with Sufi shrines were condemned by some puritanically
minded scholars, such as Ibn Taymiyya, Ibn [Abd al Wahhab (d. 1206/1791),
al Shawkani (d. 1255/1839) and, later, by thirteenth/nineteenth century Muslim
reformers, as a gross violation of the doctrine of divine oneness, which,
according to them, forbade seeking the assistance of anyone or anything
other than God. It should, however, be pointed out that not all 'saints'

The New Cambridge History of Islam

were necessarily Sufis, and that some Sufi orders occasionally discouraged
worship at saints' tombs.

Sufi institutions in regional contexts

After examining the rise and subsequent evolution of the first major Sufi
brotherhoods, it would be helpful to consider their respective roles in various
geographical areas of the Muslim world over the last seven centuries.

The Maghrib

Here Sufi lodges and military outposts became an essential part of the local
religious and social landscape, both in towns and in the countryside. The

fundamentals of 'Sufi science' were often taught in local religious colleges
(madrasas) and, conversely, Islamic theology and jurisprudence became part
of the curricula of local Sufi lodges, the zawiyas and ribats. In many areas of the
Maghrib Sufi zawiyas and, from the eighth/fourteenth century, Sufi orders
became an important factor of social and political life. Their leaders were
favourably positioned to secure social cohesion of local communities in times
of political anarchy and breakdown of the central power, when the sover
eignty of the state was often confined to a few urban centres, leaving the rest
of the country at the mercy of tribal chiefs and local strongmen. Under such
circumstances Sufi leaders often acted as mediators between warring parties
and tribes, and frequently stepped in to protect the local agricultural popula
tion from their depredations. 39

Throughout the Middle Ages, and into the modern epoch, relations
between the Maghrib! brotherhoods and the country's rulers were ambiva
lent, and at times tense. While the latter welcomed the consolidating and
stabilising role of Sufi leaders and therefore lavishly endowed Sufi zawiyas and
ribats, they were suspicious of their autonomous tendencies. Such suspicions
were not always groundless, as some popular Sufi leaders were prone to
entertain their own political ambitions. The most dramatic example of a Sufi
bid for political power is the attempt of the Sufi leadership of the Shadhili
zawiya at Dila] to wrest power from the Sa'did dynasty of Morocco in the
eleventh/seventeenth century. The leaders of the Shadhiliyya exercised a
particularly pervasive influence upon the social and political life of the
Maghrib. Of its numerous offshoots, one should mention the powerful and
influential tariqa founded by the charismatic recluse Muhammad aljazuli

39 B. G. Martin, Muslim brotherhoods in nineteenth eentury Africa (Cambridge, 1976), pp. 1 8.

90

Sufism

(d. c. 869/1465). 4 ° His popularity was such that his followers came to see him
as the awaited messiah (mahdT). Apprehensive of al Jazuli's charismatic person
ality and influence on the masses, the local governor had him poisoned.
This caused a popular revolt of his numerous disciples that continued until
890/1485.

Al Jazuli's popularity sprang, among other things, from his abolition of a
formal Sufi novitiate. Those who wanted to join his tariqa, the Jazuliyya, had
simply to declare their allegiance to its founder and his successors. Thanks to
this 'streamlined' admission procedure and simplicity of rituals the ranks of
the Jazuliyya soon swelled, although its followers never formed a centralised
Sufi order. 41 The Jazuliyya gave rise to several popular brotherhoods, includ
ing the Hansaliyya and the Tayyibiyya, which enjoyed substantial followings
in the territories of present day Algeria and Morocco.

The early thirteenth/nineteenth century witnessed an attempt to breathe
new life into Maghribi Sufism. A movement for Sufi revival was led by a
popular shaykh of the Shadhili order named al Darqawi (d. 1239/1823), who
attacked various popular 'superstitions' that had adhered to Sufism in the
course of its long history and preached humility and detachment from the
affairs of this world. Nevertheless, some of his followers adopted an activist
stance and participated in several Berber rebellions against the ruling dynasty. 42

In addition to the Shadhiliyya and the Jazuliyya, the Qadiriyya too enjoyed
wide popularity among the Maghribi populations both in towns and in the
countryside. Like other Maghribi orders, it usually did not constitute a
cohesive, centralised movement. Rather, one can define it as a spiritual and

devotional tradition current among some local communities. 43 A few branches
of the Khalwatiyya order, especially the Rahmaniyya, gained prominence in
the territories of present day Tunisia and Algeria from the end of the twelfth/
eighteenth century. The teachings of these orders were synthesised by Shaykh
Ahmad al Tijani (d. 1230/1815), the founder of the popular Tijaniyya tariqa that
was active in Morocco, the Western Sahara and the Sudan. A follower of both
the Shadhiliyya and the Khalwatiyya, al Tijani adopted the ritual practices of
both orders. 44 As with the Jazuliyya, he imposed no special penances or
spiritual exercises upon his followers, emphasising above all his role as the

40 V. Cornell, Realm of the saint (Austin, 1998), pp. 155 71.

41 J. S. Trimingham, Sufi orders in Islam, 2nd edn (Oxford, 1998), pp. 84 5.

42 Ibid., p. 85.

43 Martin, Muslim brotherhoods, pp. 15 67.

44 J. M. Abun Nasr, The Tijaniyya: A Sufi order in the modern world (Oxford, 1965).

91

supreme saint of his age (al qutb) and as the intercessor par excellence between
God and man. Although al Tijarii himself belonged to several orders, he strictly prohibited his followers from joining any other local Sufi institutions.

He encouraged a quiet dhikr and looked down upon visits of saints' tombs in
search of blessing (baraka). Acting through a network of 'emissaries' (muqad
datnuri), he managed to spread his initiatic line across the Maghrib. Under his
successors it penetrated into western and central Sudan, where it gained a
following primarily among the Fulbe and Tokolor.

The brotherhoods that combined shamanistic and animistic practices with
tarlqa ideology and organisation constitute a special group. The most prominent
among them was the controversial 'Isawa, founded by Muhammad ibn 'Isa al
Mukhtar (d. 931/1524), an ascetic of Shadhili Jazuli persuasion (see chart 2.5). His
followers practised spectacular dhikr and faith healing sessions that were often
accompanied by trances and communication with the spirits of local folklore.
Similar practices were cultivated by the related Moroccan order named the
Hamdushiyya, which originated in the eleventh/seventeenth century.

An important movement for revival of Sufism in various areas of Africa,
including the Maghrib, is associated with Ahmad ibn Idris (d. 1253/1837), a
native of Morocco, who spent most of his life in Egypt and the Hijaz. 45 His
principal legacy was his numerous students, who converted Sufism into a
powerful instrument of mass mobilisation and instituted several popular
religio political movements in north eastern and eastern Africa, including the
Sanusiyya of Cyrenaica and the Central Sahara, the Khatmiyya (Mirghaniyya)
of the Sudan, Egypt, Yemen, Ethiopia and Eritrea, as well as the Rashidiyya
Salihiyya and the Dandarawiyya, which were active in Egypt, Somalia and
South East Asia (Malaysia). These and other orders laid the foundations of
Sufism's triumph in Africa in the thirteenth/nineteenth century, which is some
times referred to as Africa's 'Sufi century'.

Sufism in sub Saharan Africa exhibited many common features with that of the

Maghrib. In fact, it is sometimes hard to draw a crisp geographical borderline
between these regions, since many Maghribi shaykhs proselytised among the
populations of sub Saharan Africa. In many cases the same brotherhood had
branches in both areas; most of the sub Saharan African orders derived their
genealogy from a Maghribi order. The Qadiriyya enjoyed considerable success in
the Western Sahara, from present day Mauritania to eastern Mali, where it
was promoted by the scholars of the Arabic speaking Kunta tribe in the late

45 R. O'Fahey, The enigmatic saint: Ahmad ibn Idns and the Idnsi tradition (Evanston, IL,
1990).

92

Sufism

twelfth/ eighteenth early thirteenth/nineteenth centuries. The leader of one of
the Kunta branches, SIdi alMukhtar al Kabir (d. 1226/1811), who combined
personal charisma with political and commercial acumen, established a major
centre of dissemination of the Qadiriyya. It is from the sub order that he estab
lished, the Mukhtariyya, that most of the Qadiri groups in West Africa derive their
affiliation. The Qadiri Tijarii rivalry dominated the spiritual and intellectual land
scape of West Africa in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries CE.

Sufism in the Ottoman lands

In Anatolia, the Balkans and the Arab provinces of the Ottoman empire we find
a wide variety of Sufi orders. One of them, the Khalwatiyya, owes its name to
Muhammad ibn Nur, who had earned the sobriquet 'al Khalwatt because of his
habit of spending time in spiritual retreat (khalwa). However, its real founder
was Yahya al Shirwani of Shamakha (present day Azerbaijan), who died in Baku
in 869/1464 (see chart 2.4). Yahya is the author of the Wird alsattar the
favourite prayer book of most of the Khalwati branches. Yahya s deputies
(khalifas) 'Umar Rushani and Yusuf al Shirwani spread the order's teachings
in Anatolia and Khurasan. Their disciples Demirdash al Muhammad! (d. 929/
1524) and Ibrahim Gulshani (940/1533) founded their own orders,
al Demirdashiyya and al Gulshaniyya respectively, both with their centres in
Cairo. Two branches of the latter order gained some renown: al Seza'iyya,
founded by Hasan Seza'i (d. 1151/ 1738 in Edirne) and al Haletiyya, founded by
Hasan Haleti 'All A c la (d. 1329/1911 in Edirne). Among the khalifas succeeding
Yusuf al Shirwani the most notable were Shams al Din Ahmad Sivasi (d. 1006/
1597 in STvas) and 'Abd alAhad Nuri Sivasi (d. 1061/ 1650 in Istanbul) who
established their own sub orders, the Shamsiyya and the SIvasiyya.

Initially, the order spread in Anatolia, mainly in the Amasya region, which was
then governed by the future Ottoman sultan Bayazid II. Here, the most notable
shaykh of the order was Jamal al Din al Aqsaral, known as Celebi Efendi, who
died around 903/1497 near Damascus. This branch of the Khalwatiyya was
named aljamaliyya after him. After the death of his successor, Yusuf Siinbul
Sinan al Din (d. 936/1529 in Istanbul), it was renamed al Siinbiiliyya. During the
rule of Bayazid II (886 918/1481 1512) the order s centre migrated to Istanbul. It
achieved prominence under Siileyman the Magnificent (r. 926 74/1520 66) and
SelTm II (r. 974 82/1566 74), when many high ranking officials in the Ottoman

administration were affiliates of the order and favoured it over its rivals. Through
their good offices it received substantial donations in cash and property, which
allowed it to recruit more members.

Over time new branches of the Khalwatiyya, which are too numerous to be
listed here, appeared in Ottoman Anatolia. The most important of them, the
Sha'baniyya, was established by Sha'ban Wall al Qastamum, who, after a
period of study at Istanbul, settled in Kastamonu, where he died in 976/
1568. His lieutenant Shaykh Shuja' (d. 996/1588) had influence on the mysti
cally minded sultan Murad III (r. 982 1003/1574 95) and his courtiers. The
Sha'baniyya gained fresh impetus under the leadership of 'All Qarabash Wall
(d. 1097/ 1685), who established the popular Qarabashiyya branch of the
Sha'baniyya Khalwatiyya, which was active in central Anatolia (Kastamonu
and Ankara) and in Istanbul. His teachings had a long lasting impact on the
fortunes of the Khalwatiyya, not just in Anatolia, but also in the Arab
provinces of the Ottoman empire, where it contributed to the revival of the
Khalwati tradition at the end of the twelfth/ eighteenth century. 46 Qarabash
Wall's pupil Nasuhi Mehmed (d. 1130/ 1718 in Istanbul) established his own
tariqa, al Nasuhiyya, which in turn gave birth to the Cherkeshiyya, named
after CherkeshI Mustafa (d. 1229 /1813). Cherkeshi, a native of the town of
Cherkesh, south west of Kastamonu, introduced several innovations aimed at
lightening the ritual and spiritual obligations of the order's followers and

expanding its popular base. In the first half of the twelfth/ eighteenth century
a new branch of the Qarabashiyya emerged under the leadership of Mustafa
Kamal al Din al Bakri (d. 1162/ 1749), called al Bakriyya after him. Al Bakri' s
foremost lieutenant and successor in Egypt, Muhammad ibn Salim al Hifni
(d. 1181/1767 in Cairo), presided over a spectacular blossoming of the
Khalwatiyya in Egypt in the thirteenth/ nineteenth century. 47

On the doctrinal plane, many Khalwati masters adhered to the teachings of
Ibn al 'Arab! and his followers, especially the concept of the oneness of being
(wahdat al wujud). Others advised caution and insisted that it can be applied
only to certain levels of existence. Mustafa al Bakri rejected Ibn al 'Arabi's
monistic tendencies altogether, 48 stressing the unbridgeable chasm between
God and his creatures. He and his followers derived the teachings of the order
from aljunayd the epitome of 'moderate' Sufism. On the practical level,
special emphasis was placed on voluntary hunger (/«'), silence (samt), vigil
(sahaf), seclusion (Vtizal), recollection (dhikr), meditation (fikr), permanent

46 F. de Jong, 'Mustafa Kamal al Bakri (1688 1749): Revival and reform of the Khalwatiyya
tradition', in N. Levtzion and J. O. Voll (eds.), Eighteenth century renewal and reform in
Islam (Syracuse, NY, 1987).

47 F. de Jong, Turuq and turuq linked institutions in nineteenth century Egypt (Leiden, 1978).

48 E. Bannerth, 'La Khalwatiyya en Egypte', Melanges de Vlnstitut Dominicain d'Etudes
Orientales, 8 (1964 6).

Sufism

ritual cleanness and tying (rdbt) one's heart to that of the master. The hallmark
of the Khalwatiyya and its numerous subdivisions is the periodic retreat
(khalwa) that it required of every member.

Apart from the Khalwatiyya, we find several other popular orders in the
Turkic speaking territories stretching from Anatolia to eastern Turkistan. If
we were to identify a typical Turkic order, the Yasawiyya of Transoxania and
Turkistan would fit the bill. From the sixth /twelfth century onward this
loosely structured initiatic line was active in disseminating Islam among the
Turkic peoples of the steppe and the Mongol rulers of the Golden Horde. Its
founder, Ahmad Yasawi, or Yasevi (d. 562/1162), was probably a disciple of the
great charismatic leader Abu Yusuf Hamadani (d. 534/1140), who in turn traced
his spiritual genealogy back to Abu Yazid al Bistami. Yasawi' s poetic collection
in a Turkic vernacular, Hikmet (Wisdom), became the ideological foundation
of his loosely structured order. Passages from the Hikmet were chanted during
Yasawi assemblies, which were often accompanied by frantic dances and
ecstatic behaviour. 49 Emissaries and disciples of Ahmad Yasawi spread his
teachings in the regions of Syr Darya, Volga, Khwarazm and as far as eastern
Turkistan. The expansion of the Yasawiyya went hand in hand with the
Islamisation of the Central Asian steppes. 50 After the tenth/sixteenth century
the Central Asian Yasawiyya gradually lost its influence to the powerful
Naqshbandiyya order, with which it was closely associated.

As early as the seventh/thirteenth century we find references to the
'wandering dervishes' (qalandariyya) who were to become part of the social
landscape of Central Asia and Anatolia. The Qalandars were individualistic
drifters who did not form permanent communities. However, they donned

distinctive garments and followed the unwritten rules that set them apart from
ordinary, affiliated Sufis. By the tenth/sixteenth century the Qalandari groups
had disappeared from Anatolia, yet they survived in Central Asia and eastern
Turkistan until the beginning of the twentieth century CE. 51

Although the Qalandariyya spread primarily in the eastern lands of Islam, 52,
it first asserted itself as a recognisable trend within Sufism in Damascus and
Damietta (Egypt) in the early decades of the seventh/thirteenth century. Its

49 T. Zarcone, 'Le Turkestan chinois', in A. Popovic and G. Veinstein (eds.), Les voies
d'Allah: Les ordres soufis dans le monde musulman (Paris, 1996), p. 270.

50 D. DeWeese, Islamization and native religion of the Golden Horde: Baba Tiikles and
conversion to Islam in historical and epic tradition (University Park, PA, 1994).

51 Zarcone, 'Le Turkestan', pp. 268 70.

52 J. Baldick, 'Les Qalenderis', in A. Popovic and G. Veinstein (eds.), Les voies d'Allah,
pp. 500 1.

founder, Jamal al Din Sawi, or Savi (d. c. 630/1223), bequeathed to his followers
such distinctive practices as shaving the hair, beard, moustache and eyebrows,

avoidance of gainful employment and itinerancy. After his successful career as
a conventional Sufi master, Jamal al Din grew disgusted with the trappings of
institutionalised Sufism, abandoned his comfortable position as head of a Sufi
lodge, gave up his property and began to roam the land in the company of
forty dervishes. Despite the individualistic and anti establishment message
preached by Jamal al Din, his disciples soon formed a community of wander
ing dervishes. He himself was forced to make concessions to the exigencies of
everyday life in order to sustain the nascent Qalandari community. Contrary
to his original teaching, which demanded that his followers survive on wild
weeds and fruit and go around naked with only leaves to cover the loins, Jamal
al Din issued a dispensation that allowed them to accept alms and wear heavy
woollen garments to cover their private parts. 53

Jamal al Din and his followers professed a deep contempt for formal
learning, the conventions of social life and worship and for secular and
religious authorities. They despised precious metals and valuable objects,
but worshipped beautiful faces, which they considered to be manifestations
of divine beauty in a human guise. In Anatolia Jamal al Din's followers came to
be known as 'the wearers of sack cloth' (jawlaqiyya). The movement consisted
of a congeries of small localised groups that were found, apart from Anatolia,
in Iran and India. An extreme version of Qalandari piety was pursued by the
Haydariyya brotherhood, which flourished in the eastern Ottoman domains
in the ninth/fifteenth and tenth/ sixteenth centuries. Its members 'covered
themselves with sacks, coarse felt, or sheep skins' and wore 'iron rings on their
ears, necks, wrists, and genitals'. 54 They took a dim view of official religion
and deliberately flouted the conventions of social conduct. Ottoman scholars
routinely accused the Haydaris of such vices as paedophilia, the smoking of

cannabis and drunkenness. 55

Closely related to the Qalandariyya is the Bayramiyya, which was founded
in the ninth/fifteenth century in Ankara by Hajji Bayram (d. 833/1429), who
claimed to be the restorer of the Malamati tradition of Khurasan. In line with
the precepts of the original Malamatiyya he prohibited his followers from
engaging in a public dhikr and ostentatiously displaying their piety. A splinter
group of the Bayramiyya, led by 'Urnar (Omer) the Cutler (Sikkini; d. 880/

53 Karamustafa, God's unruly friends, pp. 43 4.

54 Ibid., p. 68.

55 Baldick, 'Les Qalenderis', p. 501.

96

Sufism

1476) refused to recognise the authority of Hajji Bayram's successor, Aq Shams
al Din, and formed an independent branch known as Malamatiyya
Bayramiyya. This split was probably caused by the rivalry between two
groups of Hajji Bayram's disciples; however, later sources cast their disagree
ment in doctrinal terms. While followers of Aq Shams al Din adopted a
mainline Sufi doctrine that stressed the unbridgeable gap between God and
his creatures, the Bayramiyya embraced al Hallaj's idea that God can manifest
himself in the personalities of some saintly individuals, especially in the
leaders of the Malamatiyya. This concept scandalised many Sunni 'ulatn<? of

the Ottoman state, who interpreted it as an implicit denial of the finality of the
divine dispensation and the blurring of the all important line between what is
permitted and what is prohibited under the Islamic law. As a result, the
Bayramiyya was subjected to persecutions which forced it underground and
made its followers conceal their true beliefs from the uninitiated masses,
including the ruling class, whom they regarded as mere 'animals' undeserving
of the subtle truths of the Malamati teaching. 56

Until the first quarter of the tenth/ sixteenth century the Malamatiyya
Bayramiyya was confined to Central Anatolia. It was introduced to the
Balkans by one Ahmad the Cameleer (d. 952/1545) and became especially
deep rooted in Bosnia, where it adopted an anti government stance by refus
ing to recognise the legitimacy of the incumbent Ottoman sultan. However,
after more than a century of persecution, some branches of the Malamatiyya
finally abandoned their original antinomian beliefs and adopted a moderate
doctrinal position that stressed the primacy of the sharfa. This transformation
attracted to the Malamatiyya some members of the Ottoman ruling elite, who
were instrumental in consolidating its orthodox credentials.

The history of the Bektashiyya begins with the arrival in Anatolia from
Khurasan of its semi legendary founder Hajji Bektash in the middle of the
seventh/thirteenth century. Little is known about his background except
that he had some association with the babas the itinerant preachers who
spread Islam in Anatolia among the recently immigrated Turkic nomadic
and semi nomadic tribes; 57 Hajji Bektash may have been a follower of Baba
Ilyas and Baba Ishaq, who led a popular revolt that shook the Saljuq state

56 T. Zarcone, 'Muhammad Nur al 'Arab! et la confrerie Malamiyya', in Popovic and
Veinstein (eds.), Les voies d'Attah, p. 480.

57 I. Melikoff, 'L'ordre des Bektachis et les groupes relevant de Hadji Bektach', in
A. Popovic and G. Veinstein (eds.), Bektachiyya: Etudes sur l'ordre mystique des Bektachis

et les groupes relevant de Hadji Bektach (Istanbul, 1995), p. 3; cf. S. Faroqhi, 'The Bektashis:
A report on current research', in ibid., pp. 9, 13 15.

The New Cambridge History of Islam

in 638/1240. When the rebel army was demolished by the Saljuqs in the same year, Hajji Bektash was one of the few survivors, and began to propagate his version of Islam a mixture of Sufism, Shi'ism and the semi pagan beliefs 5 of the Turkic tribesmen of Anatolia. While Hajji Bektash provided the movement with his name, its true organisational founder was Balim Sultan, who was appointed as head of the chief Bektashi lodge (tekke) by the Ottoman sultan Bayazid II in 907/1501. Around that time or later, the order split into two factions. One faction, the Sofiyan, was associated with the presumed descendants of Hajji Bektash,
called Celebi, who occupied the order's main lodge between Qirshehir and
Qayseri. The other faction, known as Babagan, was ruled by the so called dede baba ('grand master'), who was elected from among eligible celibate
Bektashi preachers (babas). Members of this faction derived their genealogy
from Balim Sultan. 59 The Ottoman administration was concerned first and
foremost with the Sofiyan Celebi faction that controlled most of the order's
zawiyas and all but ignored the Babagan, who are practically absent from official records. ° They were particularly active in the provinces, for exam pie Albania, which was home to many prominent members of the order. The majority of zawiyas were run by local Celebi families, who, by and large, acknowledged the tutelage of the chief zawiya of Hajji Bektash. The
headship of all such zawiyas was for the most part hereditary, although the
new incumbent had to secure the approval of the Ottoman administration and the shaykh of the chief zawiya. This centralised control was essential to

prevent the local branches of the order from being 'hijacked' by 'extremist'
religious groups, which were lumped together under the blanket name of 'Qizilbash' or 'Ghulat'. These groups operated in the countryside and were
notorious for their heterodoxy (e.g. they held 'All, the Prophet's cousin, to be a manifestation of God). 2 A typical Bektashi tekke consisted of the lodge
proper with an oratory, bakery, women's quarters, kitchen and a hostel for travellers and visitors. The tekkes and zawiyas were supported through
pious endowments, usually tracts of land. For the most part such endow ments were barely enough to provide for the needs of the tekke's inhabitants

58 Melikoff, 'L'ordre', p. 4.

59 J. Birge, The Bektashi order of dervishes (London, 1937), pp. 56 8; N. Clayer,
'La Bektachiyya', in Popovic and Veinstein (eds.), Les voies d'AUah, pp. 468 9.

60 Faroqhi, 'The Bektashis', p. 19.

61 Clayer, 'La Bektachiyya', p. 470.

62 Melikoff, 'L'ordre', p. 6.

Sufism

and their visitors, although several wealthy lodges exported large quantities
of grain. 3

The order's political importance was determined by its close links to the Janissary Corps, whose warriors regarded Hajji Bektash as their patron saint. When the sultan Mahmud II decided to disband the Janissaries in 1241/182.6, many of the Bektashi centres were closed and their property confiscated by the Ottoman chancery or given to other orders, primarily the Naqshbandiyya. 64

The origin of many Bektashi beliefs and practices remains moot. Their most
salient feature is their syncretism. Christian elements are evident in the
initiation rituals of the order (e.g. the distribution of cheese, wine and
bread) and in its practices (e.g. a confession of sins before the spiritual
leader).
Other beliefs seem to go back to 'extreme' Shi'ism, such as the veneration of
'All and his progeny, as well as to the secret belief that 'All, Muhammad and
God form a trinity. One can also point out an affinity between Bektashi
teachings and the secret cabbalistic speculations of the heretical Hurufryya
sect and other 'extremist' groups of the Qizilbash Turcomans which deified
their leaders. 65 Finally, the Bektashiyya combined some pre Islamic Turkic
cults which it inherited from its first Turcoman followers with standard Sufi
teachings, such as the concept of the Sufi path as a means towards self
perfection and entering into the presence of God.

Mughal India
The following brotherhoods have been particularly prominent in India:
Chishtiyya, Suhrawardiyya, Qadiriyya, Shattariyya, Naqshbandiyya,
Kubrawiyya, Firdawsiyya and Aydarusiyya. In the course of their develop
ment they produced numerous semi independent sub orders. While such
tariqas as the Chishtiyya and the Naqshbandiyya were spread out all over
the country, there were also regional, localised brotherhoods. Thus, the
Suhrawardiyya was active mainly in the Punjab and Sind; the followers of
the Shattariyya concentrated in Mandu, Gwalior and Ahmedabad; the
Firdawsiyya was, for the most part, confined to Bihar; the 'Aydarusiyya
recruited its adherents in Gujarat and the Deccan, etc.

The Chishtiyya and the Suhrawardiyya were the first tariqas to reach India.
Introduced by Khwaja Mu'in al Din Hasan Chishti (d. 634/1236), the Chishti

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63 S. Faroqhi, Der Bektaschi Orden in Anatolien (Vienna, 1981), pp. 53 5.
64 Faroqhi, 'The Bektashis', p. 21; Clayer, 'La Bektachiyya', p. 469.
65 Melikoff, 'L'ordre', pp. 4 5; Faroqhi, 'The Bektashis', pp. 23 6.

order thrived under the leadership of Nizam al Din Awliya 1 of Delhi (d. 725/
1325), who gave it all India status. His numerous disciples set up Chishtl
centres all over the country. The Suhrawardiyya was introduced into India
by Shaykh Baha' al Din Zakariyya' (d. 661/1262). A native of Kot Karor (near
Multan), he studied under Shihab al Din al Suhrawardi of Baghdad, who later
sent him as his deputy (khalifa) to Multan (see chart 2.4). On arrival, Baha'
al Din managed to establish a magnificent khanqah, which gradually evolved
into a major centre of Sufism in medieval India. Unlike contemporary Chishtl
Sufis, who were eager to mingle with the masses, Baha' al Din kept aloof from
the populace and cultivated friendship with men of quality. Thanks to their
donations his khanqah accumulated great wealth, which Baha' al Din used to
buy off the Mongol armies that threatened to invade Multan. The
Suhrawardiyya reached its acme under Shaykh Rukn al Din Abu '1 Fath
(d. 735/1334) and Sayyidjalal al Din Makhdum i Jahaniyan (d. 788/1386).

Though both the Suhrawardiyya and the Chishtiyya looked to Shihab
al Din al Suhrawardf s 'Awarifal ma l arif as their guide, they differed in their
organisation of communal life and relations with the state. While the first
Chishtl masters refused to accept donations from the government and relied
exclusively on pious gifts of private individuals, their Suhrawardi counterparts
pointedly cultivated friendship with the ruling class, and benefited from its
largesse. 67

The Firdawsiyya tariqa, which traced its genealogy back to the Kubrawiyya
of Central Asia, was introduced into India by Shaykh Badr al Din of

Samarqand (see chart 2.4). Initially its leaders were based in Delhi, but later
moved to Bihar, where the order enjoyed great popularity under Shaykh
Sharaf al Din Yahya Maneri (d. 782/1371), a diligent hadith collector and a
sophisticated exponent of Sufi teachings. The Qadiriyya was established in
India by Sayyid Muhammad Makhdum Gilani (d. 923/1517) and flourished
under such masters as Dawud Kirmani (d. 982/1574), Shah Qumays Gllani
(d. 998/1584), Miyan Mir (d. 1045/1635) and Mulla Shah (d. 1072/1661).

The Shattariyya was introduced into India by Shah [Abd Allah (d. 890/1485),
a descendant of Shihab al Din al Suhrawardi. On reaching India Shah [Abd
Allah acquired a throng of devoted disciples, whereupon he settled at Mandu
and established the first Shattari khanqah. Under his disciples his tariqa spread
to Bengal, Djawnpur and in northern India. Under Shaykh Muhammad

66 C. Ernst, Eternal garden: Mysticism, history, and politics at a South Asian Sufi center
(Albany, 1992).

67 A. Schimmel, Mystical dimensions of Islam (Chapel Hill, NC, 1975) pp. 342, 352.

Sufism

Ghawth of Gwalior (d. 970/1562) the tariqa received a compact organisation
and a distinctive ideological direction. A prolific writer and eloquent preacher,
he sought to establish good relations with the Hindus by hosting them in his
khanqah and cultivating bulls and cows. The Shattariyya maintained friendly
relations with secular rulers and played an active role in local politics.

Muhammad Ghawth helped Babur in his conquest of Gwalior, and he and his elder brother Shaykh Bahlul were on friendly terms with Babur's succes
sor, Humayun (r. 937 63/1530 56), whom they instructed in the intricacies of
Sufi teachings. Emperors Akbar and Jahangir built imposing shrines over the
tombs of some popular Shattari masters. However, after the death of Muhammad Ghawth the influence of the Shattariyya was overshadowed by
its principal rivals, the Qadiriyya and Naqshbandiyya.

In the tenth/ sixteenth century the Naqshbandi tariqa was introduced into India by Khwaja Baqi Bi J llah (d. 1012/1603). It reached its high water
mark under his chief disciple, Shaykh Ahmad Sirhindi (d. 1034/1624), who
expanded the order so successfully that, according to one observer, his disciples reached every town and city in India (see chart 2.6). For about two centuries it was the most influential and popular tariqa in India, and many of the eminent figures of the time, such as Shah Wall Allah, Mirza Mazhar Jan i Janan, Shah Ghulam 'All and others, belonged to it. A member
of the Naqshbandiyya, Khwaja Mir Nasir (d. 1172/1758) founded a new branch of the order called Tariqa yi Muhammad! Another prominent Naqshbandi teacher, Sayyid Ahmad Barelwi (d. 1247/ 1831) instituted a new
order known as Tariqa yi Nubuwwat. It encouraged its followers to emulate
the Prophet's behaviour. Under Shah Ghulam 'All the Indian branch of the
Naqshbandi order, which had come to be known as the Mujaddidiyya, spread across the entire Muslim world.

The heyday of the Indian tariqas was during the Mughal period. Contemporary sources mention about two thousand Sufi ribats and khanqahs
in Delhi and its surroundings during the ninth /fifteenth century. They experi
enced a gradual decline under British rule. Indian tariqas have a number of
distinguishing features. First, except for the Naqshbandiyya, most of them
embraced Ibn al Arabi's doctrine of the oneness of being (wahdat alwujud). To
counter what they regarded as dangerous social implications of this doctrine,
some Naqshbandi leaders introduced the doctrine of the 'oneness of witnessing'

(wahdat al shuhud), which denied that the monistic experiences of the mystic
necessarily reflect the real state of affairs in the universe, and held that a strict
distinction must be asserted between God and his creatures. Second, except for
the early Chishti masters, the leaders of all other tariqas were eager to maintain

close relations with the rulers in an effort to influence state politics as a means of
gaining access to state support. Third, while the Naqshbandiyya required that its
followers engage in rigorous self negating exercises aimed at subduing their ego,
flesh and base instincts, the Chishtiyya and Suhrawardiyya were more concerned
with inculcating in their followers the awareness of the underlying unity of all
existence and, consequently, tranquillity in the face of adversity and hardship.
Fourth, whereas the Chishtiyya disseminated its teachings by word of mouth,
the Naqshbandiyya relied on epistles (maktubat) to propagate its tenets among its
actual and potential followers. The Qadiriyya, on the other hand, made extensive
use of poetry to popularise its ideas. Fifth, the Chishtiyya encouraged communal
living in special dormitories (jama'at khana), while other tariqas constructed
khanqahs and hospices with provision for individual accommodation. Sixth, the
Chishtiyya looked upon concern for social welfare and helping the needy as a
means to achieving spiritual progress and to obtaining the pleasure of God; other
tariqas, particularly the Naqshbandiyya, believed in rigorous individual discipline
and arduous ascetic exercises to reach God. Seventh, the Indian tariqas practised

different types of dhikr. The Naqshbandiyya insisted on the silent 'dhikr of the
heart', whereas the Qadiriyya practised both the loud (dhikr ijahr) and the quiet
ones (dhikr i kha.fi). Eighth, the Shattariyya sought to internalise mystical disci
pline and tried to develop a synthesis of Hindu and Muslim mysticism, whereas
the Naqshbandiyya rejected any compromise with Hinduism. Ninth, each Indian
Sufi was expected initially to belong to a single taxvqa, and to structure his
spiritual life according to its principles. Later on, Indian murlds started to join
several brotherhoods and spiritual lines at once, a practice that undermined the
stability of Sufi institutions. As multiple membership became common among
Indian Sufis, attempts were made at reconciling conflicting points of different
Sufi teachings and practices. Thus Amir Abu '1 'Ula Akbarabadi tried to combine
the doctrines and practical teachings of the Chishtiyya and the Naqshbandiyya,
while Shah Wall Allah of Delhi viewed the difference between wahdat al wujud
and wahdat al shuhud as merely a difference of perspectives that refer to the same
underlying truth. Finally, almost every Indian tariqa had one central book on
which its ideology was based: the Fawa'id alfu'ad for the Chishtiyya; the
Maktubat i imam rabbani for the Naqshbandiyya; the fawahir i khamsa for the
Shattariyya; the Maktubat of Sharaf al Din Maneri for the Firdawsiyya, etc.

Indonesia and Iran

The first concrete evidence of Sufism's presence in Indonesia is found in the
sources from the late tenth/sixteenth century at least three centuries after the
introduction of Islam into this area. This and the following century witnessed a

rapid dissemination of Sufi ideas and practices among the local populations,
especially in the flourishing Muslim sultanate of Aceh (Atjeh) in northern
Sumatra. Here we find the first prominent exponent of Sufism in the
Indonesian Archipelago, Hamza Fansuri, who was active in the second half of
tenth/sixteenth century. An adherent of the doctrine oiwahdat al wujud and of
seven levels of existence, as expounded by Ibn al Arab! and his follower 'Abd
al Karlm al Jill (d. 832/1428), Fansuri is famous for his mystical poems of great
lyrical power and mystical treatises that describe the four stages of the mystical
path (sharfa, tanqa, haqlqa and ma'rifa), the nature of existence (wujud), divine
attributes and mystical rapture. Commentaries on some of Hamza Fansurf s
works were written by his disciple Shams al Din al Samatra 3 ! (d. 1039/ 1630),
who served as religious adviser and spiritual director to the powerful sultan
Iskandar Muda of Aceh, whom he inducted into the Naqshbandiyya brother
hood. On the death of Iskandar Muda in 1046/1636 and the accession of
Iskandar II, Shams al Din al Samatra'i lost his position to the Indo Arab scholar
Nur al Din al Raniri (d. 1068/1658). An ardent adherent of the Indian Sufi
reformer Ahmad Sirhindi, al Raniri vigorously attacked both al Samatra'i and
his teacher, Hamza Fansuri, on account of their espousal of Ibn al Arabf s
doctrine of the oneness of being (wahdat al wujud). Citing the dangerous social
and political implications of this doctrine, al Raniri ordered Shams al Din's
writings to be burned. From the eleventh/seventeenth century onwards the
orders in Indonesia developed under the influence of some Arabian teachers,
especially the Medinan scholars Ahmad Qushashi (d. 1071/ 1660), Ibrahim al
Kurani (d. 1102/1691) and Abd al Karim al Samman (d. 1189/1775). They had
multiple Sufi affiliations, which they passed on to their students from the

Indonesian Archipelago. One of such students was 'Abd al Ra'uf al Singkili (d.
late eleventh/seventeenth century), who spent nineteen years in the Hijaz.
Upon his return to the sultanate of Aceh he became a vigorous propagator
of the teachings of the Shattariyya order. His best known work, 'Umdat al muhtajin (The support of those in need), describes the methods of dhikr,
the formulas of Sufi litanies (rawatib) and breath control techniques during
mystical concerts. On the doctrinal plane, 'Abd al Ra'uf was a moderate follower of Ibn al Arabi and his commentators (especially 'Abd al Karim al JUT), whose concepts of seven stages of existence and of the perfect man
(al insan al kamil) he discussed in his works written in both Malay and Arabic.
Indonesian Sufism was initially restricted to court circles, where the teach
ings of Ibn al 'Arabi and his school, especially the concept of the perfect man,
were used by the rulers to legitimise their power. Only around the twelfth/
eighteenth century did the tongas begin to win adherents among the common

103

The New Cambridge History of Islam

people. Although for the most part apolitical, in the thirteenth/nineteenth century the tanqas sometimes provided the organisational networks for anti
colonial rebellions. As a result of this they were much feared by the Dutch
colonial administration.

Of numerous Iranian Sufi orders one should mention the Kubrawiyya and the Ni'matullahiyya. The former flourished in Central Asia and Khurasan, only to be displaced by the powerful Naqshbandiyya around the eleventh/

seventeenth century. Of the numerous branches of the Ni'matullahiyya only
the Nurbakhshiyya and the Dhahabiyya enjoyed a substantial following. The
Ni'matullahiyya, which started as a Sunni order, embraced Shfite Islam under
the Safavids. In the twelfth/ eighteenth century it was singled out for perse
cution by the Shi'ite religious establishment, probably on account of its
'extreme' doctrines of a messianic slant. It experienced a revival under the
Qajar rulers of Iran (thirteenth/ late eighteenth early nineteenth centuries),
whereupon it split into a congeries of mutually hostile sub orders.

Conclusion

Even a cursory and incomplete review of Sufism's evolution across time and
space shows that it has been inextricably entwined with the overall develop
ment of Islamic devotional practices, theology, literature, aesthetics and
institutions. Discussing Sufism in isolation from these religious, social and
cultural contexts will result in serious distortions. Sufism's cardinal ideas,
practices and values have been continually reinterpreted, rearticulated and
readjusted in accordance with the changing historical circumstances of its
adherents. Any attempt to posit an immutable and unchanging essence of
Islamic mysticism ignores the astounding diversity of religious and intellectual
attitudes that falls under the rubric of 'Sufism'.

S. Bashir, Messianic hopes and mystical visions: The Nurbakhshiya between medieval and
modern Islam (Columbia, SC, 2003); M. van den Bos, Mystic regimes: Sufism and state in
Iran (Leiden, 2002).

3

Varieties of Islam

FARHAD DAFTARY

The Prophet Muhammad laid the foundations of a new religion which was propagated as the seal of the great monotheistic religions of the Abrahamic tradition. However, the unified and nascent Muslim community (umma) of the Prophet's time soon divided into numerous rival factions, as Muslims disagreed on a number of fundamental issues. Modern scholarship has indeed shown that at least during the first three centuries of their history, marking the formative period of Islam, Muslims lived in an intellectually dynamic and fluid milieu characterised by a multiplicity of communities of interpretation, schools of thought and a diversity of views on a range of religio political issues. The early Muslims were confronted by many gaps in their religious knowledge and understanding of Islam, which revolved around major issues such as the attributes of God, the nature of authority and definitions of believers and sinners. It was during this formative period that different groups and move ments began to formulate their doctrinal positions and gradually acquired their distinctive identities and designations. In terms of theological perspectives, diversity in early Islam ranged from the stances of those, later designated as Sunnis, who endorsed the historical caliphate and the authority power struc ture that had actually emerged in the Muslim community, to various religio political communities, notably the Shfa and the Kharijites, who aspired towards the establishment of new orders and leadership structures.

The Sunni Muslims of medieval times, or rather their religious scholars ('ulama'), however, produced a picture that is at variance with the findings of
modern scholarship on the subject. According to this perspective, endorsed by
earlier generations of orientalists, Islam from early on represented a mono
lithic community with a well defined doctrinal basis from which different groups deviated over time. Thus, Sunni Islam was portrayed by its proponents
as the true interpretation of Islam, while all non Sunni Muslim communities,
especially the Shfa among them, who had 'deviated' from the right path, were accused of heresy (ilhad), innovation (bid' 1 a) or even unbelief (ku.fr).

105

The New Cambridge History of Islam

As a result, the orientalists, too, studying Islam mainly on the basis of Sunni
sources, endorsed the normativeness of Sunnism and distinguished it from
ShTism, or any other non Sunni interpretation of Islam, with the aid of terms
such as 'orthodoxy' and 'heterodoxy' terms grounded in their Christian experience and categorically inapplicable to an Islamic context.

The ShTa, too, have elaborated their own paradigmatic model of 'true Islam', based on a particular interpretation of early Islamic history and a distinctive conception of religious authority vested in the Prophet's family (ahl al bayt). The ShTa, whose medieval scholars, similarly to the Sunni c ulama\ did not generally allow for doctrinal evolution, also disagreed among themselves regarding the identity of the legitimate spiritual leaders
(imams) of the community. As a result, the ShTa themselves in the course of
their history subdivided into a number of major communities, notably the Imami Ithna 'Asharis or Twelvers, the Isma'ilis and the Zaydis, as well as

several minor groupings. There were also those Shi'ite communities, such as
the Kaysaniyya, who did not survive even though they occupied important
positions in early ShTism. At any rate, it is to be noted that each Shi'ite
community has possessed a distinct self image and perception of its earlier
history, rationalising its own claims and legitimising its leadership and the
authority of its line of imams to the exclusion of other communities.

In such a milieu of pluralism and diversity of communal interpretations,
abundantly recorded in the heresiographical tradition of the Muslims, obvi
ously general consensus could not be attained on designating any one inter
pretation of Islam as 'true Islam', as different regimes too lent their support to
particular doctrinal positions that were legitimised in different states by the
'utoma'. It is important to emphasise that many of the original and fundamen
tal disagreements among Sunnis, ShTa and other Muslims will probably never
be satisfactorily explained and resolved, mainly because of a lack of reliable
sources, especially from the earliest centuries of Islamic history. As is well
known, almost no written records have survived from the formative period of
Islam, while the later writings of the historians, theologians, heresiographers
and other Muslim authors display variegated 'sectarian' biases. It is within
such a frame that this chapter concentrates mainly on ShTism and its
divisions.

Origins and early history of Shfism

The origins of Islam's divisions into Sunnism and ShTism may be broadly traced
to the crisis of succession to the Prophet Muhammad, who died after a brief
illness in 11/632. As the 'seal of the prophets' (khatim alanbiycC) Muhammad

Varieties of Islam

could not be succeeded by another prophet (nabT), but a successor was needed to
assume his functions as leader of the Islamic community and state. According to
the Sunni view a successor had not been designated, and in the event this choice
was resolved by a group of Muslim notables who chose Abu Bakr as 'successor to
the Messenger of God' (khalifat rasul Allah). The Muslims had now also founded
the distinctive Islamic institution of the caliphate (khilafa). Abu Bakr and his next
two successors, 'Umar and 'Uthman, belonging to the influential Meccan tribe
of Quraysh, were among the early converts to Islam and the Prophet's
Companions (sahaba). Only the fourth of the 'rightly guided' (rashiduri) caliphs,
'All ibn Abi Talib (r. 35 40/656 61), who occupies a unique position in the annals
of Shi'ism, belonged to the Prophet's own clan of Banu Hashim within the
Quraysh. All was also closely associated with the Prophet, being his cousin and
son in law, bound by marriage to the Prophet's daughter Fatima.

It is the fundamental belief of the ShTa of all branches that the Prophet
himself had designated 'All as his successor, a designation (nass) instituted
through divine command and revealed by the Prophet at Ghadrr Khumm
shortly before his death. In addition to the hadlth of Ghadir Khumm, which
was proclaimed publicly in Kufa by 'All, the Shi'a have also interpreted certain
Qur'anic verses in support of All's designation. 'All himself was firmly con
vinced of the legitimacy of his own claim to succeed Muhammad, based on his
close kinship and association with him, his intimate knowledge of Islam and
his early merits in the cause of Islam. Indeed, 'All made it plain in his speeches

and letters that he considered the Prophet's family (ahl al bayt) to be entitled to
the leadership of the Muslims. 1 The partisans of 'All also held a particular
conception of religious authority that set them apart from other Muslims. They believed that a full understanding of Islam, including its inner dimen
sion, necessitated the continuing presence of a religiously authoritative guide or imam, as the Shi'a have traditionally preferred to call their spiritual
leader. And for the Shi'a the ahl al bayt provided the sole authoritative channel
for elucidating the teachings of Islam.

Pro 'All sentiments and broad ShTite tendencies persisted in 'All's lifetime,
and were strongly revived during the caliphate of 'Uthman (r. 23 35/644 56), a
period of strife in the community. 'All succeeded to the caliphate in turbulent
circumstances following 'Uthman' s murder, marking the first civil war in Islam.
Centred in Kufa, the partisans of 'All now became generally designated as sWat
'AE, 'party of 'Alt, or simply as the Shi'a. They also referred to themselves by

W. Madelung has produced an exhaustive analysis of the existing historiography on the

subject in his The succession to Muhammad: A study of the early caliphate (Cambridge, 1997).

107

The New Cambridge History of Islam

terms with more precise religious connotations such as the shVat ahl al bayt, or

its equivalent the shTat al Muhammad, 'party of the Prophet's household', as
against the shfat c Uthman, the partisans of the murdered caliph, who were
opposed to 'All. The Umayyad Mu'awiya, the powerful governor of Syria and
leader of the pro 'Uthman party, found the call for avenging 'Uthman' s murder
a suitable pretext for seizing the caliphate.

The early Shi c a survived 'All's murder in 40/661 and numerous subsequent
tragic events. After 'All, his partisans in Kufa recognised his eldest son,
al Hasan, as his successor to the caliphate. A few months later, under obscure
circumstances, al Hasan declined to assume the role, and Mu'awiya was
speedily recognised as the new caliph. Following his peace treaty with
Mu'awiya, al Hasan retired to Medina and abstained from any political activ
ity. However, the Shi'a continued to regard him as their imam after 'All On
al Hasan's death in 49/669, the Kufan Shi'a revived their aspirations for
restoring the caliphate to the Prophet's family and invited al Hasan's younger
brother al Husayn, their new imam, to rise against the oppressive rule of the
Umayyads. In the aftermath of Mu'awiya's death and the succession of his son
Yazid, al Husayn finally responded to these summons and set out for Kufa. On
10 Muharram 61/10 October 680 al Husayn and his small band of relatives and
companions were brutally massacred at Karbala 3 , near Kufa, where they were
intercepted by an Umayyad army. The martyrdom of the Prophet's grandson
infused a new religious fervour in the Shi'a, and contributed significantly to
the consolidation of Shi'ite ethos and identity. Thenceforth the passion motif
and the call for repentance and martyrdom became integral aspects of Shi'ite
spirituality. Later, the Shfa began to commemorate the martyrdom of
al Husayn annually on 10 Muharram ('Ashura') with special ceremonies and
passion plays (ta'ziya).

During its first half century Shi'ism remained unified, and maintained an
almost exclusively Arab membership, with limited appeal to non Arab

Muslims. These features changed with the next important event in the history
of Shfism: the movement of al Mukhtar ibn Abl 'Ubayd al Thaqafi, who
launched his own Shi'ite campaign with a general call to avenge al Husayn' s
murder. Al Mukhtar claimed to be acting on behalf of 'All's only surviving son,
Muhammad ibn al Hanafiyya, whose mother was a woman of the Banu Hanifa; he was half brother to al Hasan and al Husayn, 'All's sons by Fatima.
Ibn al Hanafiyya, who declined to assume the leadership of the movement and
remained in Medina, was proclaimed by al Mukhtar as the imam and mahdl,
'the divinely guided one', the messianic saviour imam and restorer of true
Islam who would establish justice on earth and deliver the oppressed from

Varieties of Islam

tyranny. The concept of the mahdl was a very important doctrinal innovation,
and proved particularly appealing to the mawali the Aramean, Persian and
other non Arab converts to Islam, who under the Umayyads were treated as
second class Muslims. As a large and underprivileged social class, the mawali
provided a major recruiting ground for any movement opposed to the exclu
sively Arab hegemony of the Umayyads. They became particularly drawn to
al Mukhtar's movement and Shf ism, calling themselves the shl'at al mahdl
(party of the mahdl'). Al Mukhtar readily won control of Kufa in an open
revolt in 66/685. The Shfa now took revenge for al Husayn, killing those
involved in the massacre at Karbala'. However, al Mukhtar's success was
short lived. In 67/6S7 he was defeated and killed together with thousands of

his mawali supporters. But the movement founded by al Mukhtar survived his
demise.

The sixty odd years between the revolt of al Mukhtar and the 'Abbasid revolution mark the second phase of early Shf ism. During this period differ
ent Shfite groups, consisting of both Arabs and mawali, came to coexist, each
one having its own imams and propounding its own doctrines. Further
more, the Shfite imams now hailed not only from the major branches
of the extended 'Alid family, namely the Hanafids (descendants of Ibn
al Hanafiyya), the Husaynids (descendants of al Husayn ibn All) and, later,
the Hasanids (descendants of al Hasan ibn 'All), but also from other branches
of the Banu Hashim including the descendants of the Prophet's uncles Abu
Talib and al 'Abbas. This is because the Prophet's family, whose sanctity was
supreme for the Shfa, was then still defined broadly in its old Arabian tribal
sense. It was after the Abbasid revolution that the Shfa came to define the ahl
al bayt more precisely to include only the Fatimid Alids, covering both the
Husaynids and the Hasanids. In this fluid and often confusing setting, Shf ism
developed in terms of two main branches or trends, the Kaysaniyya and the
Imamiyya, each with its own internal divisions; and, later, another Shfite
movement led to the foundation of the Zaydiyya. There were also those
Shfite ghulat, individual theorists with small groups of followers, who existed
in the midst or on the fringes of the major Shfite communities.

A radical branch, in terms of both doctrine and policy, evolved out of al
Mukhtar's movement and accounted for the bulk of the Shfa until shortly
after the 'Abbasid revolution. This branch, breaking away from the religiously
moderate attitudes of the early Kufan Shfa, was generally designated as the
Kaysaniyya by the heresiographers who were responsible for coining the
names of numerous early Muslim communities. The Kaysaniyya, named
after the chief of al Mukhtar's guard, Abu Amra Kaysan, and comprising a

The New Cambridge History of Islam

number of interrelated groups recognising various Hanafid 'Alids and other
Hashimites as their imams, drew mainly on the support of the mawall in
southern Iraq, Persia and elsewhere, though many Arabs were also among
them. Heirs to a variety of pre Islamic traditions, the mawali played an
important role in transforming ShTism from an Arab party of limited size
and doctrinal basis to a dynamic movement.

On Ibn al Hanafiyya's death in 81/700, the Kaysaniyya split into several
groups commonly designated as sects (firaq) by the heresiographers. In the
ideas expounded by these Kaysani groups we have the first Shi'ite statements
of the eschatological doctrines of ghayba, the absence or occupation of an
imam whose life has been miraculously prolonged and who is due to reappear
as the mahdl, and rafa, the return of a messianic personality from the dead, or
from occultation, some time before the Day of Resurrection (qiyama). The
closely related concept of the mahdl had now more specifically acquired an
eschatological meaning as the messianic deliverer in Islam, with the implica
tion that no further imams would succeed the mahdl during his occultation. Be
that as it may, the majority of the Kaysaniyya recognised Ibn al Hanafiyya's
son Abu Hashim as their next imam. These Kaysanis, known as the
Hashimiyya, accounted for the bulk of the contemporary ShTa. On Abu
Hashim's death in 98/716 the majority of the Hashimiyya recognised the
'Abbasid Muhammad ibn c Ali ibn 'Abd Allah ibn al 'Abbas as their new
imam. They held that Abu Hashim had personally appointed his Abbasid
relative as his successor to the imamate. This party continued to be known as
the Hashimiyya and later also as the 'Abbasiyya; it served as the main instru
ment of the 'Abbasid movement.

The Kaysaniyya elaborated some of the doctrines that came to distinguish
the radical wing of early ShTism, which was also characterised by messianic
aspirations. For instance, they condemned the three caliphs who preceded 'All
as usurpers. Many of the Kaysani doctrines were propounded by the so called
ghaliya or ghulat (sing. ghalT), 'exaggerators'. The ghulat were accused retro
spectively by the more moderate Shi c a of later times of exaggeration (ghu
luww) in religious matters and with respect to their imams. In addition to
attributing superhuman qualities to imams, the early ghulat speculated freely
on a range of wider issues, such as the soul, death and afterlife. Many of the
ghulat thought of the soul in terms of the doctrine of metempsychosis or
transmigration of souls (tanasukh), involving the passing of the individual soul
(nafs or ruh) from one body to another.

In the mean time there had appeared another major branch or faction of
Shi'ism, later designated as the Imamiyya, the common heritage of the

Varieties of Islam

Twelver and Isma'ili Shi'a. The Imamiyya, who like other Shi'a of the
Umayyad period were based in Kufa, adopted a quiescent policy in the
political field while doctrinally subscribing to some of the views of
the Kaysaniyya, such as the condemnation of the caliphs before 'All.
The Imamiyya traced the imamate through al Husayn ibn 'All's sole surviving
son, 'All ibn al Husayn Zayn al 'Abidin, who gradually came to be held
in great esteem in the pious circles of Medina. It was after 'All ibn al Husayn
(d. c. 95/714) that the Imamiyya began to gain some importance under his son
and successor Abu Ja'far Muhammad ibn 'All, known as al Baqir. Imam al
Baqir engaged in active Shi'ite teachings in the course of his imamate of some
twenty years. Above all, he seems to have concerned himself with the

religious rank and spiritual authority of the imams. He is also credited with
introducing the principle of taqiyya, the precautionary dissimulation of one's
true religious belief and practice that was to protect the imam and his
followers under adverse circumstances. This principle was later adopted by
the Twelver and Isma'ili Shi'a. It should also be added that the teaching of 'Abd
Allah ibn al 'Abbas (d. 68/687), the Prophet Muhammad and 'All's cousin, had
a significant impact on early Imami religious and legal doctrine.

On al Baqir's death around 114/732, the majority of his partisans recognised
his eldest son Abu 'Abd Allah Ja'far, later called al Sadiq (the Trustworthy), as
their new imam. In the earlier years of al Sadiq's long and eventful imamate,
the movement of his uncle Zayd ibn 'All, al Baqir's half brother, was launched
with some success, leading to the formation of the Zaydiyya. Zayd visited
Kufa and was surrounded by the Shi'a, who urged him to lead a rising. Zayd's
revolt proved abortive, however, and he and many of his followers were killed
in 122/740. Few details are available on the ideas propagated by Zayd and his
original followers. According to some later, unreliable, reports, Zayd was an
associate of Wasil ibn 'Ata' (d. 131/748), a reputed founder of the theological
school of the Mu'tazila. However, modern scholarship has shown that the
doctrinal positions of the early Shi'a and the Mu'tazila were rather incompat
ible during the second /eighth century. It was only in the latter part of the
third /ninth century that both Zaydism and Imami Shi'ism came to be influ
enced by Mu'tazilism. 2

Meanwhile, the 'Abbasids had learned important lessons from all the
abortive Shi'ite revolts against the Umayyads. Consequently, they paid partic
ular attention to developing the organisation of their own movement,

2 See W. Madelung, Der Imam al Qasim ibn Ibrahim und die Glaubenslekre der ZaiAiten
(Berlin, 1965), esp. pp. 7 43, which is the best modern study on the subject.

The New Cambridge History of Islam

establishing secret headquarters in Kufa but concentrating their activities in
Khurasan. The 'Abbasid da'wa was cleverly preached in the name of al rida
min al Muhammad, an enigmatic phrase which spoke of an unidentified person
belonging to the Prophet's family. This slogan aimed to maximise support
from the Shi'a of different groups who commonly supported the leadership of
the ahl al bayt.

However, the 'Abbasid victory in 132/749 proved a source of disillusion
ment for the Shi'a, who had all along expected an Alid, rather than an
'Abbasid, to succeed to the caliphate. The animosity between the Abbasids
and the 'Alids was accentuated when, soon after their accession, the Abbasids
began to persecute many of their former Shi'ite supporters and the 'Alids, and,
subsequently, became the spokesmen of a Sunni interpretation of Islam. The
'Abbasids' breach with their Shi'ite roots was finally completed when the third
caliph of the dynasty, Muhammad al Mahdi (r. 158 69/775 85), declared that
the Prophet had actually appointed his uncle al 'Abbas, rather than 'All, as his
successor. With these developments, the remaining Kaysani Shi'a sought to
align themselves with alternative movements. In Khurasan and other eastern
regions many of these alienated Shi'a attached themselves to groups generi
cally termed the Khurramiyya (or Khurramdlniyya), espousing a variety of

anti 'Abbasid and anti Arab ideas. In Iraq, however, they rallied to the side of
Imam Ja'far al Sadiq or Muhammad ibn 'Abd Allah al Nafs al Zakiyya, then the
main 'Alid claimants to the imamate of the Shi'a. With the demise of the
Hasanid movement of al Nafs al Zakiyya in 145 I761L, Imam al Sadiq emerged
as the main rallying point for Shi'a of diverse backgrounds other than the
Zaydis, who were following their own imams.

Meanwhile, Ja'far al Sadiq had gradually acquired a widespread reputation
as a religious scholar. He was a reporter ofhadith, and later cited as such in the
chain of authorities (isnad) accepted by Sunnis as well. He also taught fiqh
(jurisprudence) and has been credited with founding, after the work of his
father, the Imami Shi'ite madhhab (school of religious law), named Ja'fari after
him. Imam al Sadiq was accepted as a teaching authority not only by his Shi'ite
partisans but by a wider circle that included many other piety minded
Muslims. In time he acquired a noteworthy group of scholars around himself,
comprising some of the most eminent jurist traditionists and theologians of
the time, such as Hisham ibn al Hakam (d. 179/795), the foremost representa
tive of Imami scholastic theology (kalam). Indeed, the Imamiyya now came to
possess a distinctive body of ritual as well as theological and legal doctrines.
Like his father, Imam al Sadiq attracted a few ghulat thinkers to his circle of
associates, but kept the speculations of the more extremist elements of his

Varieties of Islam

following within bounds by imposing a certain doctrinal discipline. The fore
most radical theorist in al Sadiq' s following was Abu '1 Khattab al Asadi

(d. 138/755), who acquired many followers of his own, the Khattabiyya.

As a result of the intellectual activities of Imam al Sadiq and his circle of
associates, and building on the teachings of Imam al Baqir, the basic
concep
tion of the doctrine of the imamate had become defined in its outline.
This
doctrine, expressed in numerous hadiths reported mainly from Ja'far al
Sadiq,
is preserved in the earliest corpus of Imami hadxth compiled by Abu
Ja'far
Muhammad al Kulayni (d. 329/940), and retained by the Isma'ilis in their
foremost legal compendium produced by al Qadi Abu Hanlfa al Nu'man
ibn
Muhammad (d. 363/ 974). 3 The Imami Shi'ite doctrine of the imamate,
which
was essentially retained by the later Ithna 'Asharis and the Isma'ilis, was
founded on a belief in the permanent need of mankind for a divinely
guided
and infallible (ma c sum) imam who, after the Prophet Muhammad, would
act as
the authoritative teacher and guide of men in their spiritual affairs.
Although
the imam, who can practise taqiyya when necessary, is entitled to
temporal
leadership as much as religious authority, his mandate does not depend
on
having temporal authority. The doctrine further taught that the Prophet
himself had designated All ibn Abi Talib as his legatee (wasi) and
successor,
by an explicit nass under divine command. However, the majority of the
Companions disregarded the Prophet's testament. After 'All, the imamate
was
to be transmitted from father to son by nass, among the descendants of
All and
Fatima; and after al Husayn it would continue in the Husaynid line until
the
end of time. This 'Alid imam, the sole legitimate imam at any time, is in
possession of special knowledge {Him), and has perfect understanding of
all
aspects and meanings of the Qur'an and the message of Islam. Indeed,
the
world cannot exist for a moment without such an imam, who is the proof
of
God (hujjat Allah) on earth. The imam's existence is so essential that
recog
nition of and obedience to him were made the absolute duty of every
believer.

Having established a solid doctrinal basis for Imami Shi'ism, Ja'far ibn Muhammad al Sadiq, the last of the early Shi'ite imams recognised by both
the Isma'ilis and the Ithna 'Asharis (Twelvers), counted as the fifth one for the
former and the sixth for the latter, died in 148/765. The dispute over his succession caused historic divisions in Imami Shi'ism leading to the eventual
formation of independent Ithna 'Ashari and Isma'ili communities.

3 These hadiths are contained in the Kitab al hujja, the first book in Abu Ja'far Muhammad
ibn Ya'qub al Kulaym's al Usui min al ka.fi, ed. 'A. A. al Ghaffari, 2 vols. (Tehran, 1388/
1968), vol. I, pp. 168 548, and in the Kitab al walaya in al Qadi al Nu'man' s Da'a'im
al Islam, ed. A. A. A. Fyzee, 2 vols. (Cairo, 1951 61), vol. I, pp. 14 98.

113

The New Cambridge History of Islam

Later Imami Ithna 'Asharis or Twelvers

On Imam Ja'far al Sadiq's death in 148/765 his succession was simultaneously
claimed by three of his sons, 'Abd Allah al Aftah, Musa al Kazim and Muhammad al Dibaj, while a group of the Imamiyya denied his death and awaited his return as the mahdi. As we shall see, there were also those proto
Isma'Hi Imamis who now recognised the imamate of al Sadiq's second son
Isma'H or the latter' s son Muhammad. At any rate, the Imamiyya now split
into six groups, one of which eventually acquired the designation of the Ithna
'Ashariyya or Twelvers, recognising a line of twelve imams.

The majority of al Sadiq's followers initially recognised his eldest surviving

son c Abd Allah al Aftah as his successor. When Abd Allah died a few months
later in 149/766, they turned to his younger brother Musa al Kazim, who already had a following of his own. Those Imami ShTa who continued to recognise 'Abd Allah as the rightful imam before Musa became known as Aftahiyya (or Fathiyya); they constituted an important Imami sect in Kufa until
the fourth/tenth century. Musa al Kazim, later counted as the seventh imam
of the Twelvers, who excluded 'Abd Allah from the list of their imams, soon
received the allegiance of the majority of the Imami Shi'a, including the most
renowned scholars in al Sadiq's entourage. In spite of refraining from all political activity, Musa was not spared the persecutions of the 'Abbasids. He
was arrested several times and imprisoned on the caliph Harun al Rashid's
orders. In 183/799, on his death in a Baghdad prison perhaps due to poisoning, as the Twelvers claim in the case of almost all their imams many of his partisans considered him as their seventh and last imam, who
would return as the mahdi. These Imamis formed another sizeable group in
Kufa known as the Waqifa. However, another group of Musa al Kazim's following acknowledged his son 'Ali al Rida as their new imam, later counted
as the eighth in line of the Twelver imams. The caliph al Ma'mun attempted
to achieve reconciliation between the 'Abbasids and Alids by appointing 'Ali
al Rida as his heir apparent in 201/816, also giving the imam a daughter in
marriage. This attempt proved futile when 'Ali died two years later in Khurasan, where he had joined the entourage of al Ma'mun. A new city near Tus, called Mashhad (martyr's place), grew around 'Ali al Rida's tomb
and became the most important Shi'ite shrine in Persia. Imam al Rida's Shi'a
traced the imamate for three more generations in his progeny down to their
eleventh imam, al Hasan al 'Askari, with minor schisms. These imams, too,
were brought to Baghdad or Samarra' (the new 'Abbasid capital), and watched
closely by the Abbasids.

Varieties of Islam

On al Hasan al 'Askari's death in 260/8731". his Imami partisans experienced
a crisis of succession, and subdivided into numerous splinter groups. 4 Many
believed that the deceased imam had left no male progeny, and recognised al
Hasan himself as the mahdi. Others acknowledged al Hasan's brother Ja'far as
their new imam, on the basis of different arguments. However, the main
body, later designated as the Ithna c Ashariyya, eventually held that a son
named Muhammad had been born to al Hasan al 'Askari in 255/869 and that
the child had remained hidden. They further held that Muhammad had
succeeded his father to the imamate while remaining in concealment.
Identified as the mahdi or qa'im, Muhammad was expected to reappear in
glory before the final Day of Judgement to rule the world injustice.

According to Ithna Ashari tradition Muhammad al Mahdi' s occultation fell
into two periods. During his initial 'lesser occultation' (al ghayba al sughra),
covering 260 329/873 941, the imam remained in regular contact with four
successive agents, called variously the gate (bob), emissary (safir) or deputy
(na'ib), who acted as intermediaries between him and his community. But in
the 'greater occultation' (al ghayba alkubra), initiated in 329/941 and still
continuing, the hidden imam has chosen not to have any representative living
on earth and participating in the affairs of the world. Enjoying miraculously
prolonged life, his titles include the 'lord of the age' (sahib alzaman) and the
'expected imam' (al imam al muntazar), among others. Twelver Shfite schol

ars have written extensively on the eschatological doctrines of occultation
(ghayba) of their twelfth imam and the conditions that would prevail before his
return irafa) or parousia (zuhur). By the first half of the fourth/tenth century,
when the line of the twelve imams had been identified, those ShTa believing in
that series of imams became known as the Ithna 'Ashariyya, and they were
distinguished from all earlier Imam! groups.

In the first period of their religious history the Imami (Ithna c Ashari) Shfa
benefited from the direct guidance and teachings of their imams. It was in the
second period, from the occultation of the twelfth imam until the Mongol age,
that Twelver scholars emerged as influential guardians and transmitters of the
teachings of the imams, compiling collections of Imami hadith and formulating
the law. This period coincided with the rise of the Buyids, or Buwayhids, to
power in Persia and Iraq, as overlords of the c Abbasids. The Buyids were
originally Zaydi Shi'a from Daylam, but now they supported Mu'tazilism and

4 Abu Muhammad al Hasan ibn Musa al Nawbakhtl, Kitab firaq al ShTa, ed. H. Ritter
(Istanbul, 1931), pp. 79 94; Sa'd ibn 'Abd Allah al Ash'ari al Qummi, Kitab al maqalat
wa'lfiraq, ed. M.J. Mashkur (Tehran, 1963), pp. 102 16.

115

The New Cambridge History of Islam

ShTism without allegiance to any of its specific branches. The earliest com
prehensive collections of Twelver traditions of the imams, which were first
transmitted in Kufa and elsewhere, were compiled in Qumm, in Persia. By the
late third/ninth century, when these activities were well under way, Qumm
had already served for more than a century as a chief centre of Imam! Shi'ite
learning. The earliest and most authoritative of the ImamI hadith collections is
the Kitabal kafiby al Kulayni(d. 329/940), which also came to be recognised as
the first of the four ImamI canonical collections, al kutub al arba c a (the four
books), dealing with theology and jurisprudence. The traditionist school of
Qumm, which rejected all forms of kalam theology based on extensive use of
independent reasoning and instead relied on the traditions of the Prophet and
the imams, reached its peak in the works of Ibn Babawayh, also known as
Shaykh al Saduq (d. 381/991). He produced the second major compilation of
ImamI hadith called Man la yahduruhu'lfaqlh (He who has no legal scholar in
his proximity). Ibn Babawayh was strongly opposed to the Mu'tazila and their
kalam methodology, preferring to base his own doctrine on the use ofhadiths
with a minimum of reasoning.

In the course of the fourth/tenth century, the Shfite century of Islam with
Buyids, Fatimids, Qaramita and others in power, the school of Qumm was
overshadowed by the rise of a rival school of ImamI theology in Baghdad
which adhered to the rationalist theology (kalam) of the Mu'tazila and also
produced the principles of ImamI jurisprudence (usul alfiqh) based on a legal
methodology opposed to unqualified adherence to tradition. 5 It may be
recalled at this juncture that members of the influential Banu Nawbakht
Twelver family in Baghdad, notably Abu Sahl Isma'Il (d. 311/923) and his
nephew al Hasan ibn Musa (d. between 300 and 310/912 and 922), had already
pioneered the amalgamation of the Mu'tazilite theology with Imami doctrine.
The first leader of the Baghdad school was Muhammad ibn Muhammad al

Harithi, known as Shaykh al Mufid (d. 413/1022), who criticised the creed of
Ibn Babawayh, his teacher. He argued for the methodology of religious disputation and kalam, and espoused the Mu'tazilite acceptance of human
free will and denial of predestination, also rejecting anthropomorphism. On
the other hand, the Baghdad school rejected those Mu'tazilite doctrines that
were in conflict with the basic ImamI beliefs related to the imamate. Thus,
refuting the Mu'tazilite dogma of the unconditional punishment of the Muslim sinner, it allowed for the intercession (shaja'a) of the imams for the

5 W. Madelung, 'Imamism and Mu'tazilite theology', in T. Fahd (ed.), Le SM'isme imdmite
(Paris, 1970), pp. 13 28.

Varieties of Islam

sinners of their community to save them from punishment, also condemning
the adversaries of the imams as infidels and maintaining that the imamate was,
like prophecy, a rational necessity.

Shaykh al Mufid was succeeded as chief authority of the Baghdad school by
his student Sharif al Murtada c Alam al Huda (d. 436/1044), a descendant of
Musa al Kazim and also head (naqib) of the c Alid family. He went further than
al Mufid and insisted, like the Mu'tazila, that the basic truths of religion are to
be established by reason {'aql) alone. Even the traditions were to be subjected

to the test of reason rather than being accepted uncritically. It is to be noted
here that al Murtada s younger brother Sharif al Radi (d. 405/1015) is respon
sible for having compiled the Nahj al balagha (Peak of eloquence), an anthol
ogy of the letters and sermons of 'All ibn Abi Talib, which serves as one of the
most venerated books of the Twelvers.

Muhammad ibn al Hasan al Tusi (d. 460/1067), known as Shaykh al Ta]ifa,
another member of the Baghdad school who studied with both Shaykh al
Mufid and Sharif al Murtada, became the most authoritative early systematiser
of Twelver law. His two main works, al Istibsar (Consideration) and the
Tahdhib al ahkam (Appeal of decisions), are included among the 'four books'
of the Twelvers. Al Tusi also partially rehabilitated the school of Qumm and
its reliance on traditions. He argued that although many of the traditions of
the Imam! traditionists were of the ahad (singly transmitted) category and
therefore unacceptable on rational grounds, they were nevertheless to be
sanctioned for having been universally used by the Imami community in the
presence of the imams themselves. It was also during this period that the
earliest Imam! bio bibliographical works (kutub al rijal), listing trustworthy
authorities and transmitters of hadith, were compiled by Shaykh al Tusi
himself, as well as others such as Ahmad ibn 'All al Najashi (d. 450/1058).

In the mean time Twelver Shfite communities had appeared in numerous
parts of Persia and Transoxania. Shi'ism received a serious blow when the
Sunni Saljuqs succeeded the Shfite Buyids. But the situation of the Twelver
Shfa improved when the Mongols established their rule in south west Asia. By
then a number of local dynasties in Iraq and Syria adhered to Twelver Shi'ism
and encouraged the work of their i ulama\ such as the 'Uqaylids of Iraq and the
Hamdanids and Mirdasids of Syria. With the collapse of the QarmatI state of
Bahrayn, a number of Twelver communities and dynasties had also begun to

gain prominence in eastern Arabia and in other locations around the Persian
Gulf. Foremost among these local dynasties were the Mazyadids, who had
their capital at Hilla on the banks of the Euphrates. Indeed, from the
opening decade of the sixth/ twelfth century Hilla was established as an

important centre of Shi'ite activity, and it later superseded Qumm and
Baghdad as the main centre of Imami scholarship. Meanwhile, Sharif al
Murtada s basic approach to kalam, holding that reason alone was the sole
source of the fundamentals of religion, had become widely accepted in
Twelver circles. The same approach was later adopted, without any significant
revision, by the then chief exponents of Imami kalam, Khwaja Nasir al Din al
Tusi (d. 672/i273f) and his disciple al Hasan ibn Yusuf Ibn al Mutahhar al Hilli
(d. 726/1325), who in fact represented the last school of original thought in
Twelver theology. Subsequently, with a few exceptions, Twelver Shi'ite
scholars mainly produced commentaries on, or restatements of, the earlier
teachings. Indeed, with the Mongol invasions and NasTr al Din al Tusi a third
period was initiated in Twelver Shl'ism, which lasted until the establishment
of the Safavid dynasty. In this period the influence of al Tusi in both theology
and philosophy was a key factor, while close relations developed between
Twelver theology and the Sufism of Ibn al 'Arab! (d. 638/1240).

Ibn al Mutahhar al Hilli, known as 'AUama al Hilli, was a major scholar
from Hilla. A prolific writer and author of numerous legal treatises, 'Allama al
Hilli had lasting influence on the development and theoretical foundations of

Twelver jurisprudence. Following in the tradition of the Baghdad school, he
provided a theoretical foundation for ijtihad, the principle of legal ruling by the
jurist through reasoning (c aql). In his MabadV al wusul ila Him al usul (Points of
departure for attaining knowledge of the principles) 'Allama al Hilli expounds
the principles of ijtihad, exercised by mujtahids, who, he argues, are fallible by
comparison to infallible imams. The mujtahid can, therefore, revise his deci
sion. Ijtihad also allowed for ikhtilaf, or differences of opinions among mujta
hids. Al Hillf s acceptance of ijtihad represents a crucial step towards the
enhancement of the authority of the jurists ifuqaha') in Twelver Shl'ism.
Ijtihad also gained importance within the Zaydi Shfite communities, but it
was rejected by the Isma'llls.

Meanwhile, Shfite tendencies had been spreading in Persia and Central
Asia since the seventh/thirteenth century, creating a more favourable milieu
in many predominantly Sunni regions for the activities of the Shl'a (both
Twelvers and Isma'ilis) as well as a number of other movements with Shi'ite
inclinations. In this connection particular reference should be made to the
Hurufi movement founded by the Shi'ite Sufi Fadl Allah AstarabadI (d. 796/
1394), whose doctrines were later adopted by the BektashI dervishes of
Anatolia; and the Nuqtawis who split off from the Hurufiyya under the initial
leadership of Mahmud i Pasikhani (d. 831/1427). There were also the
Twelver related Musha'sha' of Khuzistan, founded by Ibn Falah (d. c. 866/

118

Varieties of Islam

1461), who claimed Mahdism. The Musha'sha' ruled over parts of Iraq, and

under their persecutionary policies Hilla lost its prominence as a centre of
Twelver learning to Jabal 'Amil in Lebanon. These movements normally
entertained messianic aspirations for the deliverance of oppressed and under
privileged groups. Instead of propagating any particular form of Shi'ism,
however, a new syncretic type of popular Shi'ism was now arising in post
Mongol Central Asia, Persia and Anatolia, which culminated in early Safavid
Shrism. Marshall Hodgson designated this as 'tariqah Shi'ism', as it was trans
mitted mainly through a number of Sufi orders then being formed. The Sufi
orders in question remained outwardly Sunni, following one of the Sunni
madhhabs, while being particularly devoted to 'All and the ahl al bayt. It was
under such circumstances that close relations developed between Twelver
Shi c ism and Sufism, and also between Nizari Isma'ilism and Sufism in Persia.
The most important Twelver Shi'ite mystic of the eighth/fourteenth century,
who developed his own rapport between Twelver Shi'ism and Sufism, was
Sayyid Haydar Amuli (d. 787/1385), who was influenced by the teachings of
Ibn al 'Arab!.

A fourth and final period may be identified in the development of Twelver
Shi'ism, from the establishment of Safavid rule to the present. Among the Sufi
orders that contributed to the spread of 'Alid loyalism and Shi'ism in predom
inantly Sunni Persia, the most direct part was played by the Safawiyya tariqa,
founded by Shaykh Safi al Din(d. 735/1334), a Sunni of the Shafi'i madhhab. The
Safawi order spread rapidly throughout Azerbaijan, eastern Anatolia and other
regions, acquiring influence over several Turcoman tribes. With Shaykh Sari's
fourth successor, Junayd (d. 864/1460), the order was transformed into a
revolutionary movement. Junayd's son and successor Shaykh Haydar (d.
893/1488) was responsible for instructing his soldier Sufi followers to adopt
the scarlet headgear of twelve gores commemorating the twelve imams, for
which they were dubbed the Qizilbash, a Turkish term meaning redhead.

The eclectic Shi'ism of the Qizilbash Turcomans became more clearly

manifested when the youthful Isma'il became the shaykh of the Safawi order. Isma'il represented himself to his Qizilbash followers as the represen
tative of the hidden imam, or even the awaited mahdi himself, also claiming
divinity. With the help of his Qizilbash forces Isma'il speedily seized Azerbaijan from the Aq Qoyunlu dynasty and entered their capital, Tabriz,
in 907/1501. He now proclaimed himself shah (king), and at the same time

6 Marshall G. S. Hodgson, The venture of Islam: Conscience and history in a world civilization,
3 vols. (Chicago, 1974), vol. II, pp. 493ft.

declared Twelver Shl'ism the official religion of his newly founded Safavid
state. Shah Isma'il brought all of Persia under his control during the ensuing
decade, and his dynasty ruled until 1135/1722.

The Safavids originally adhered to an eclectic type of Shl'ism which was gradually disciplined and brought into conformity with the tenets of 'ortho
dox' Twelver Shl'ism. In order to enhance their legitimacy, Shah Isma'H and
his immediate successors claimed variously to represent the hidden mahdi, in
addition to fabricating an 'Alid genealogy for their dynasty, tracing their ancestry to Imam Musa al Kazim. Shl'ism was, in fact, imposed on the subjects
of the Safavid empire rather gradually, while the Safavids from early on strove
to eliminate any major religio political challenge to their supremacy. As a result, under Shah Isma'il (r. 907 30/1501 24) and his son and successor

Tahmasp (r. 930 84/1524 76) the Safavids articulated a religious policy for
the elimination of all millenarian and extremist movements, persecution of
Sufi orders and popular dervish groups and suppression of Sunnism while
actively propagating Twelver Shl'ism. As Persia did not have an established
class of religious scholars, however, the Safavids were obliged for quite some
time to invite scholars from the Arab centres of Twelver scholarship, notably
Najaf, Bahrayn and Jabal 'Amil, to instruct their subjects. Foremost among
these Arab Shi'ite 'ulama^ mention should be made of Shaykh 'All al Karaki al
'Amili (d. 940/1534), known as the Muhaqqiq al Thani, who adhered to the
Hilla school of Imami kalam with its recognition of ijtihad for the qualified
scholars, combined with taqlid, or authorisation of the majority who emulated
the mujtahid.

Meanwhile, the Safavids encouraged the training of a class of Imami legal
scholars who would propagate the established doctrines of Twelver Shl'ism.
The training of the Twelver scholars was further facilitated through the
foundation of a number of religious colleges. By the time of Shah 'Abbas I
(r. 995 1038/ 1587 1629), the greatest member of the dynasty, who established
his capital at Isfahan, the Safavids' claim to any divine authority or to repre
senting the mahdi were rapidly fading, while the Qizilbash had lost their
influence and the Sufi orders had disappeared almost completely from
Persia. On the other hand, Twelver Shi'ite rituals and practices, such as regular
visiting (ziyara) of the tombs of the imams and their relatives in the 'atabat
Najaf, Karbala' and other shrine cities of Iraq, as well as in Mashhad and
Qumm in Persia had gained wide currency.

The Safavid period witnessed a renaissance of Islamic sciences and Shi'ite
scholarship. Foremost among the intellectual achievements of the period
should be noted the original contributions of a number of Shi'ite scholars

Varieties of Islam

belonging to the so called 'school of Isfahan'. These scholars integrated a variety of philosophical, theological and gnostic traditions within a ShPite perspective into a metaphysical synthesis known as al hikma al ilahiyya (Pers.
hikmat i ilahT), divine wisdom or theosophy. The founder of this school was
Muhammad Baqir Astarabadi (d. 1040/ 1630), known as Mir Damad, a Shfite
theologian, philosopher and poet who was also the shaykh al Islam (chief religious authority) of Isfahan.

The most important representative of the school of Isfahan in theosophical
Shfism was, however, Mir Damad' s principal student, Sadr al Din Muhammad
Shirazi (d. 1050/1640), better known as Mulla Sadra. He produced his own
synthesis of four major schools of Islamic thought: kalam theology; Peripatetic
philosophy (al hikma al mashsha'iyya); the illuminationist philosophy of Shihab
al Din Yahya al Suhrawardi (al hikma al ishraqiyya); and gnostic mystical tra
ditions (Hrfan), particularly the Sufisrn of Ibn al 'Arab! Similar to the 'philo
sophical Isma'ilism' expounded by the Iranian Isma'ili da'is of the Fatimid times, the members of the school of Isfahan, too, elaborated an original intellectual perspective in philosophical Shfism. Mulla Sadra trained eminent
students, such as Mulla Muhsin Fayd Kashani (d. 1091/ 1680) and Abd al Razzaq Lahiji (d. 1072/ 1661), who passed down the traditions of the school
of Isfahan in later centuries in both Persia and India.

The Twelver L ulama\ and especially the jurists among them, played an increasingly prominent role in the affairs of the Safavid kingdom. This trend
reached its climax under the last Safavids with Muhammad Baqir Majlisi (d. mi/1699), who held the highest clerical offices and consolidated the influence of the Imami hierocracy. The author of an encyclopaedic hadith collection, Bihar al anwar (Seas of lights), Majlisi, like many other jurists, was

opposed to philosophers and Sufis. However, the L ulama' also disagreed among themselves on certain theological and juristic issues, and became particularly divided into two opposing camps, generally designated as Akhbari and Usuli, on the role of reason in religious matters. From early on,
traditionist and rationalist trends had existed within Twelver Shfism. The original predominance of the Imamis adhering to the traditionist Akhbari position was superseded by the scholars of the school of Baghdad who established the rationalist Usuli doctrine on a solid foundation by adopting
Mu'tazili kalam principles. However, by the early eleventh/seventeenth century Mulla Muhammad Amin Astarabadi (d. 1033/ 1624) had articulated
the traditionist position afresh and, in effect, became the founder of the later Akhbari school that sought to establish Shfite jurisprudence on the basis of traditions (akhbaf) rather than the rationalistic principles (usul) of

The New Cambridge History of Islam

jurisprudence used in ijtihad. Indeed, he attacked the very idea of ijtihad and
branded the Usuli mujtahids as enemies of religion. Criticising the innovations
of the schools of Baghdad and Hilla in usul alfiqh and theology, Astarabadi
recognised the akhbar of the imams as the most important source of law, required also for correct understanding of the Qur'an and the Prophetic traditions.

The Akhbari school flourished for almost two centuries in Persia and the shrine cities of Iraq; its teachings were adopted by many eminent Twelver
scholars such as Muhammad Taqi Majlisi (d. 1070/ 1660) and Muhammad al
Hurr al Amili (d. 1104/ 1693), who compiled another vast collection of the akhbar of the imams. In the second half of the twelfth/eighteenth century,
when Twelver Shi'ism was already widespread in Persia, the Usuli doctrine
found a new champion in Muhammad Baqir Bihbaharii (d. 1208/ 1793), who

defended ijtihad and successfully led the fight against the Akhbaris. He went so
far as to brand the Akhbaris as infidels. Thereafter the Akhbaris rapidly lost
their position to the Usulis, who emerged as the prevailing school of juris
prudence in Twelver Shi'ism. The re establishment of the Usuli school was to
lead to unprecedented enhancements in the authority of the c ulama' under the
Qajar monarchs of Persia and in modern times.

Meanwhile, Twelver Shi'ism had also spread in southern Lebanon and
certain regions of India. Twelver mujtahids, who were often of Persian origin,
were particularly active in India after the disintegration of the first Muslim
state, the Bahmanid kingdom in the Deccan, and the appearance of five
independent successor Shi'ite states, which were under the influence of the
Safavids. The 'Adil Shahis of Bijapur (r. 895 1097/1490 1686) were the first
Muslim dynasty in India to adopt Twelver Shi'ism (in 908/1503) as the
religious doctrine of their state. Later, Shah Tahir al Husayni, a scholar and
a Muhammad Shahi Nizari Isma'ili imam, converted Burhan Nizam Shah, who
in 944/1537 proclaimed Twelver Shi'ism as the official faith of the Nizam
Shahi state. Sultan Quli (r. 901 50/1496 1543), the founder of the Qutb Shahi
dynasty of Golconda, also adopted Twelver Shi'ism. In India too the Imami
c ulama' encountered the hostility of the Sunnis. Nur Allah Shushtari, another
eminent Twelver theologian jurist who emigrated from Persia to India and
enjoyed some popularity at the Mughal court, was executed in 1019/1610 at
the instigation of the Sunni 'ufoma^ and on Emperor Jahangrr's orders.
However, Shi'ite communities survived even in the Mughal empire, especially
in the region of Hyderabad. Twelver Shi'ism also spread to northern India
and was adopted in the kingdom of Awadh (1722 1856) with its capital at
Lucknow.

Varieties of Islam

The Isma'ilis, Qaramita and Druzes

Representing the second most important Shi'ite community, the Isma'ilis have had their own complex history. Imam Ja'far al Sadiq had originally designated his second son, Isma'il, the eponym of the Isma'iliyya, as his successor to the imamate by the rule of nass. According to the Isma'ili religious tradition Isma'il survived his father and succeeded him in due course, while most non Isma'ili sources relate that he predeceased his father.
At any rate, Isma'il was not present in Medina or Kufa at the time of Imam
al Sadiq's death in 148/765, when three of his brothers claimed the succes
sion. As noted above, this confusing succession dispute split the Imamiyya
into several groups, two of which may be identified as proto Isma'ilis or the
earliest Isma'ilis. One group denied the death of Isma'il ibn Ja'far in his father's lifetime. Dubbed al ismaHliyya al khalisa (the 'pure Isma'iliyya'), these Imami Shi'ites awaited Isma'il's return as the mahdi. 7 The second proto Isma'ili group, known as the Mubarakiyya, derived from Isma'il's epithet al Mubarak (the blessed one), affirmed Isma'il's death during the lifetime of his father and recognised his son Muhammad as their imam. Before long, Muhammad ibn Isma'il, the seventh imam of the Isma'ilis, went into hiding, marking the initiation of the dawr alsatr (period of concealment) in early Isma'ili history, which lasted until the emergence of
the Isma'ili imams as Fatimid caliphs.

It is certain that for almost a century after Muhammad ibn Isma'il (d. c. 179/
795) a group of leaders worked secretly for the creation of a unified, revolu
tionary movement against the 'Abbasids. These leaders did not openly claim
the imamate for three generations. 'Abd Allah, the first of these leaders, had in
fact organised his campaign around the central doctrine of the majority of the
earliest Isma'ilis, acknowledging Muhammad ibn Isma'il as the awaited mahdi.
This was perceived as a tactic to safeguard the leaders of the movement against 'Abbasid persecution. At any rate, 'Abd Allah eventually found refuge

in Salamiyya, which served as the secret headquarters of the early Isma'ili
movement. The Isma'ilis now referred to their movement simply as al da'wa
(the mission) or al da'wa al hadiya (the rightly guiding mission).

The efforts of 'Abd Allah and his successors began to bear fruit in the 260s/
870s when numerous da'Is appeared in southern Iraq and other regions. In
261/874 Hamdan Qarmat was converted to Isma'ilism in the Sawad of Kufa.
Hamdan and his chief assistant 'Abdan organised the da'wa in southern Iraq

7 al Nawbakhti, Firaq al Shl'a, pp. 57 61; al Qummi, Kitab al maqalat, pp. 80 1, 83.

123

The New Cambridge History of Islam

and adjacent regions. The Isma'ilis of southern Iraq became generally known
as the Qaramita, after their first local leader. The da'wa in Yemen was initiated
by IbnHawshab (d. 302/914), later known as Mansur al Yaman. By 280/893 the
da'i Abu 'Abd Allah al Shi'i (d. 298/911) was already active among the Kutama
Berbers in the Maghrib. Meanwhile, Abu Sa'id aljannabi was dispatched to
Bahrayn, in eastern Arabia, where he rapidly won converts from among the
Bedouin and the Persian emigrants. It was also in the 260s/ 870s that the da'wa
was taken to al Jibal, the west central and north western parts of Persia, where
the da'ts adopted a new policy, targeting the elite and the ruling classes. The

same policy was later adopted successfully, at least temporarily, by the dais of
Khurasan and Transoxania.

In 286/899, soon after the future Fatimid caliph 'Abd Allah al Mahdi had succeeded to the central leadership of the da'wa in Salamiyya, Isma'ilism was rent by a major schism. c Abd Allah now felt secure enough to claim the
imamate openly for himself and his predecessors, the same individuals who
had organised and led the early Isma'ili da'wa. Later he explained that, as a
form of taqiyya, the central leaders of the da'wa had adopted different pseudonyms, also assuming the rank of hujja (proof or full representative)
of the absent Muhammad ibn Isma'il. 'Abd Allah further explained that the
earlier propagation of the return of Muhammad ibn Isma'il as the mahdi was
itself another dissimulating measure. 'Abd Allah al Mahdi' s reform split the
then unified Isma'ili movement into two rival branches. One faction remained loyal to the central leadership and acknowledged continuity in the Isma'ili imamate, recognising 'Abd Allah al Mahdi and his 'Alid ancestors
as their imams, which in due course became the official Fatimid Isma'ili doctrine. On the other hand, a dissident faction, originally led by Hamdan Qarmat and 'Abdan, rejected the reform and maintained their belief in the
Mahdism of Muhammad ibn Isma'il. Thenceforth the term Qaramita came to be applied more specifically to the dissident Isma'ilis who did not acknowledge 'Abd Allah al Mahdi and his successors in the Fatimid dynasty
as their imams. The dissident Qaramita, who lacked central leadership, soon
acquired their most important stronghold in Bahrayn, where a Qarmati state
had been founded in the same eventful year, 286/899, by Abu Sa'id aljannabi. Soon after these events 'Abd Allah left Salamiyya and embarked
on a a historic journey which ended several years later in North Africa, where he founded the Fatimid caliphate.

See the letter of the first Fatimid caliph addressed to the Yemeni Isma'ilis, in Husayn F. al
Hamdani, On the genealogy of Fatimid caliphs (Cairo, 1958), text pp. 10 12.

Varieties of Islam

The early Isma'ilis elaborated the basic framework of a system of religious
thought which was further developed or modified in the Fatimid period, while
the Qaramita followed a separate doctrinal course. Central to the Isma'ili
system of thought was a fundamental distinction between the exoteric (zahif)
and the esoteric (batin) aspects of the sacred scriptures and religious com
mandments and prohibitions. They further held that the zahir, the religious
laws enunciated by prophets, underwent periodical changes, while the batin,
containing the spiritual truths (haqa'iq), remained eternal. These truths, rep
resenting the message common to Judaism, Christianity and Islam, were
explained through the methodology of ta'wil (esoteric interpretation), which
often relied on the mystical significance of letters and numbers.

The esoteric truths (haqa'iq) formed a system of thought for the Isma'iTis,
representing a distinct world view. The two main components of this
system were a cyclical history of revelations or prophetic eras and a
cosmological doctrine represented through the language of myth. Their
cyclical conception, applied to Judaeo Christian as well as several other
pre Islamic religions, was developed in terms of eras of different prophets
recognised in the Qur'an. Accordingly, they held that the religious history of
humankind proceeded through seven prophetic eras (dawrs) of various
durations, each inaugurated by a speaker or enunciator (natiq) of a divinely
revealed message which in its exoteric (zahif) aspect contained a religious
law (sharfa). The natiqs of the first six eras were Adam, Noah, Abraham,

Moses, Jesus and Muhammad. As the seventh imam of the era of Islam, Muhammad ibn Isma'il was initially expected to return as the mahdl (or qa'im) as well as the natiq of the seventh eschatological era when, instead of promulgating a new law, he would fully divulge the esoteric truths of all the preceding revelations. Recognising continuity in the imamate, the advent of the seventh era lost its earlier messianic appeal for the Fatimid Isma'ilis, for whom the final eschatological age was postponed indefinitely. On the other hand, the Qaramita of Bahrayn and elsewhere continued to consider Muhammad ibn Isma'il as their mahdi who, on his reappearance as the seventh natiq, was expected to initiate the final age.

The Fatimid period represents the 'golden age' of Isma'ilism, when the Isma'ilis possessed a state of their own and Isma'ili scholarship and literature attained their summit. 9 The foundation of the Fatimid caliphate in 297/909 in

The Fatimid era of Isma'ili history is one of the best documented periods in Islamic history: see P. E. Walker, Exploring an Islamic empire: Fatimid history and its sources (London, 2002).

125

The New Cambridge History of Islam

Ifriqiya in North Africa indeed marked the crowning success of the early Isma'ilis. The religio political da'wa of the Isma'Hiyya had finally led to the establishment of a state (dawla) headed by the Isma'ili imam, 'Abd Allah al Mahdi (r. 297 322/909 34). In line with their universal claims, the Fatimid

caliph imams did not abandon their da'wa activities on assuming power, as
they aimed to extend their rule over the entire Muslim community. And they
concerned themselves with the propagation of the Isma'ili da'wa, especially
after the transference of the seat of the Fatimid state in 362/973 to Egypt,
where Cairo was founded as their new capital city. The religio political
messages of the da'wa were disseminated by networks of da'ts within the
Fatimid dominions as well as in other regions referred to as the jazaHr (sing.
jazira, 'island').

It was during the Fatimid period that the Isma'ili da'ts, who were at the
same time the scholars and authors of their community, produced what were
to become the classical texts of Isma'ili literature, dealing with a multitude of
exoteric and esoteric subjects as well as ta'wil, which became the hallmark of
Isma'ili thought. 10 The da'is of the Iranian lands set about in the course of the
fourth/tenth century to amalgamate Isma'ili Shi'ite theology (kalatri), revolv
ing around the doctrine of the imamate, with ideas drawn from Neoplatonism
and other philosophical traditions into complex metaphysical systems of
thought. This led to the development of a unique intellectual tradition of
'philosophical theology' within Isma'Hism. The major proponents of this
tradition were the da'is Muhammad ibn Ahmad al Nasafi (d. 332/943), Abu
Hatimal Razi(d. 322/934), Abu Ya'qub al Sijistani(d. after 361/971) andHamid
al Din al Kirmani (d. after 411/ 1020). Nasir i Khusraw (d. after 462/1070), who
spread the da'wa in Badakhshan, was the last major member of this Iranian
school of Isma'ilism. Neoplatonic philosophy also influenced the cosmology
elaborated by the Isma'ili affiliated Ikhwan al Safa' (the 'Sincere Brethren'), a
group of anonymous authors in Basra, who produced an encyclopaedic work
of fifty two epistles, Rasa'il Ikhwan al Safa', on a variety of sciences during the
fourth/tenth century.

The Sunni polemicists always accused the Isma'ilis of ignoring the shari'a,
supposedly because of their emphasis on its hidden meaning, and hence they
were commonly referred to as the Batiniyya (Esotericists). However, the
Fatimids from early on concerned themselves with legal matters and the
precepts of Imami Shi'ite law. The promulgation of an Isma'ili madhhab
resulted mainly from the efforts of al Qadl Abu Hanifa al Nu'man ibn

10 See I. K. Poonawala, Biobibliography of Isma'ili literature (Malibu, 1977), pp. 31 132.

126

Varieties of Islam

Muhammad (d. 363/974), the foremost Isma'ili jurist who was officially com
missioned to prepare legal compendia. He codified Isma'ili law by systematic
ally collecting the firmly established hadlths transmitted from the ahl al bayt,
drawing on existing collections. Al Nu'man's efforts culminated in his Da'aHm
al Islam, which served as the official code of the Fatimid state. The authority of
the infallible 'Alid imam and his teachings became a principal source of Isma'ili
law. The Da'aHm al Islam has continued to be used by Tayyibi Isma'ilis as their
main authority in legal matters, while the Nizari Isma'ilis continue to be
guided in their legal affairs by their living imams.

The Fatimid caliph imam al Hakim's reign (386 411/996 1021) witnessed
the opening phase of what was to become known as the Druze religion. A
number of da'is who had come to Cairo from Persia and Central Asia, notably
alAkhram (d. 408/1018), Hamza and al Darazi, began to propagate certain
extremist ideas regarding al Hakim and his imamate. Drawing on the tradi

tions of the Shi'ite ghulat and eschatological expectations of the early Isma'ilis,
these da 'Is founded a new religious movement, and proclaimed the end of the
era of Islam and the abrogation of its shari'a. By 408/1017 (the opening year of
the Druze era) Hamza and al Darazi were also publicly declaring al Hakim's
divinity. It was after al Darazi that the adherents of this movement later
became known as Daraziyya or Duruz; hence their general designation as
Druze s.

The Fatimid Aa l wa organisation in Cairo launched a campaign against the
new doctrine. The da'l al Kirmani was invited to Cairo to refute officially the
new doctrine from a theological perspective. He composed a number of
treatises reiterating the Isma'ili Shi'ite doctrine of the imamate and rejecting
the idea of al Hakim's divinity. Nonetheless, the Druze movement acquired
momentum and popular appeal; and when al Hakim disappeared mysteri
ously during one of his nocturnal outings in 411/1021, the Druze leaders
interpreted this as a voluntary act initiating al Hakim's ghayba (occultation).
In the same year Hamza went into hiding; he was succeeded as the leader of
the movement by Baha' al Din al Muqtana. With the subsequent persecution
of the Druzes in Fatimid Egypt, the movement found its greatest success in
Syria, where a number of Druze da'Is had been active.

The Druzes eventually developed their own body of theological doctrine.
In particular, the extant letters and other writings of al Muqtana and Hamza
have been collected into a canon, arranged in six books and designated as the
Rasa'il al hikma (Epistles of wisdom), which has served as the sacred scripture
of the Druzes. A highly closed and secretive community, and observing
taqiyya very strictly, the Druzes who call themselves the Muwahhidun

(Unitarians) possess elaborate doctrines of Neoplatonic cosmology, eschatol
ogy and metempsychosis (tanasukh). Considering al Hakim as the last maqam
(locus) of the Creator, the Druzes await his reappearance (rafa) together with
Hamza, who is considered an imam. Druze teachings effectively represent a
new religion falling outside Isma'Ilism. Under the Ottomans the Druzes of
Syria and Lebanon were ruled by their own amirs, especially those belonging
to the Ma'nid and Shihabid dynasties, who remained in power until the end of
the twelfth/ eighteenth century.

Meanwhile, the Qaramita had survived in Bahrayn and in other commun
ities scattered in Iraq, Yemen, Persia and Central Asia. All the Qaramita were
still awaiting the reappearance of Muhammad ibn Isma'Il as the mahdl and final
natiq, though some QarmatI leaders themselves claimed Mahdism. After Abu
Sa'Id aljannabi (d. 300/913), several of his sons rose to leadership of the
Qarmati state of Bahrayn, where communal and egalitarian principles played
an important role. Under his youngest son, Abu Tahir Sulayman (r. 311 32/
923 44), the Qaramita became infamous for their anti 'Abbasid raids into Iraq
and their pillaging of the Meccan pilgrim caravans. Abu Tahir's ravaging
activities culminated in his attack on Mecca during the pilgrimage season in
317/930, when the Qaramita committed numerous abominations, and dis
lodged the Black Stone (al hajar al aswad) from the corner of the Ka'ba and
carried it to al Ahsa', their capital in Bahrayn. This sacrilegious act, presum
ably committed in preparation for the coming of the mahdl, shocked the entire
Muslim world and provided a unique opportunity for Sunni polemicists to
condemn the whole Isma'ili movement as a conspiracy to destroy Islam. The

Qaramita eventually returned the Black Stone in 339/950 for a large ransom
paid by the 'Abbasids and not, as alleged by anti Isma'ili sources, at the instigation of the Fatimid caliph. By the time the QarmatI state of Bahrayn
was finally uprooted in 470/1077 by the local tribal chieftains, other QarmatI
groups in Persia, Iraq and elsewhere had either disintegrated or switched their
allegiance to the Isma'ili da'wa of the Fatimids.

In the mean time, Isma'ili da l wa activities, especially outside the Fatimid
dominions, reached their peak in the long reign of al Mustansir (427 87/1036
94), even after the Sunni Saljuqs replaced the ShI'ite Buyids as overlords of the
'Abbasids in 447/1055. The Fatimid da'ls won many converts in Iraq, Persia
and Central Asia as well as Yemen, where the Sulayhids ruled as vassals of the
Fatimids from 439/1047 until 532/1138. On al Mustansir's death in 487/1094 the
unified Isma'ili da'wa split into two rival factions, as his son and original heir designate Nizar (d. 488/1095) was deprived of his succession rights by
the all powerful Fatimid vizier al Afdal, who installed Nizar's younger brother

128

Varieties of Islam

on the Fatimid throne with the title al Musta'li bi'llah (r. 487 95/1094 1101).
The imamate of al Musta'li was also recognised by the Isma'ili communities of
Egypt, Yemen and western India. These Musta'li Isma'ilis traced the imamate
in the progeny of al Musta'li. On the other hand, the Isma'ilis of Persia

supported the succession rights of Nizar and his descendants. The two factions
were later designated as the Nizariyya and the Musta'liyya.

The power of the Fatimid caliphate declined rapidly during its final decades.
The Musta'li Isma'ilis themselves split into Hafizi and Tayyibi branches on the
assassination of al Musta'li' s son and successor al Amir in 524/1130. Al Amir's
successor on the Fatimid throne, al Hafiz, and the later Fatimid caliphs were
recognised as imams by the da c wa headquarters in Cairo and the Musta'li
Isma'ilis of Egypt, Syria and a portion of the community in Yemen. These
Musta'li Isma'ilis, known as the Hafiziyya, did not long survive the downfall of
the Fatimid dynasty in 567/ 1171. On the other hand, the Musta'li community of
Sulayhid Yemen recognised the imamate of al Amir's infant son al Tayyib and
became known as the Tayyibiyya. According to the Tayyibis the disappear
ance of al Tayyib soon after his father's death in 524/1130 initiated another
era of satr (concealment) during which the Tayyibi imams have all remained
hidden (mastur); the current satr will continue until the appearance of an
imam from al Tayyib's progeny. Meanwhile, the affairs of the Tayyibi da'wa
were led by dd'is with absolute authority, known as daTx mutlaq. Around 997/
1589 the Tayyibis were divided over the question of the succession to their
daTx into Da'udi and Sulaymani factions. The Da'udis, accounting for the bulk
of the Tayyibi Isma'ilis, were mainly converts of Hindu origin, and were
known as Bohras in India, while Yemen remained the stronghold of the
Sulaymanls.

The Nizarl Isma'ilis have had their own complex history. By the time of
the Nizarl Musta'li schism of 487/1094, Hasan i Sabbah (d. 518/1124), who
preached the Isma'ili da'wa within the Saljuq dominions in Persia, had
emerged as the leader of the Persian Isma'ilis. His acquisition of the fortress
of Alamut in 483/1090 had, in fact, signalled the foundation of what would
become the Nizarl Isma'ili state. In the dispute over the succession to al

Mustansir, Hasan supported Nizar's cause, and severed his relations with the

Fatimid regime. Hasan then also founded the independent Nizarl Isma'ili da'wa on behalf of the Nizarl imam, who remained inaccessible. At the same

time, da'xs dispatched from Alamut organised an expanding Nizarl community

in Syria.

From early on the Nizarl Isma'ilis were preoccupied with survival in an extremely hostile environment. Nevertheless, they did maintain a sophisticated

The New Cambridge History of Islam

intellectual outlook and a literary tradition, elaborating their teachings in response to changed circumstances. Hasan i Sabbah himself is credited with

restating in a more rigorous form the old ShTite doctrine of ta'lim, or author

itative teaching by the imam of the time. Emphasising the autonomous teaching

authority of each imam in his own time, this became the central doctrine of the

Nizaris who were thenceforth known as the Ta'lTmiyya. The intellectual chal

lenge posed to the Sunni establishment by the doctrine of ta'lim, which also

refuted the legitimacy of the Abbasid caliph as the spiritual spokesman of all

Muslims, called forth the reaction of the Sunni establishment. Many Sunni

scholars, led by Abu Hamid al Ghazall (d. 505/1111), sought to refute this Isma'Ili doctrine.

The fourth lord of Alamut, Hasan II (r. 557 61/1162 6) to whom the Nizaris

refer with the expression 'aid dhikrihi'l saldm (on his mention be peace),

declared the qiyama (day of resurrection) in 559/1164, initiating a new phase
in the religious history of the Nizari community. Relying extensively on
Isma'ili ta'wll and earlier traditions, Hasan II interpreted the qiyama symbolic
ally and spiritually. Hasan II was also recognised as an imam, a descendant of
Nizar; and thereafter the Nizari imamate continued in his line of descent.

The surrender of the Alamut fortress to the all conquering Mongols in 654/
1256 sealed the fate of the Nizari state. The Mongols massacred large numbers
of Nizaris, also destroying their fortresses in Persia. In Syria, where the Nizaris
attained the peak of their power and fame under their most eminent da%
Rashid al Din Sinan (d. 589/1193), the sectarians attracted the attention of the
Crusaders, who made them famous in Europe as the Assassins (derived from
hashlshiyyin a local term of abuse). Medieval Europeans also disseminated a
number of legends about the secret practices of the Nizaris. By 671/1273 the
Syrian Nizari fortresses had all fallen into Mamluk hands, but the Nizaris were
permitted to remain in their traditional abodes there as subjects of Mamluks
and Ottomans.

In the post Alamut period of their history the Nizari Isma'Ili communities,
scattered from Syria to Persia, Central Asia and South Asia, elaborated a
diversity of religious and literary traditions in different languages. They also
resorted to taqiyya practices under different external guises, especially Sufism.
Indeed, by the ninth/fifteenth century a type of coalescence had developed
between Persian Sufism and Nizari Isma'Ilism. An obscure dispute over the
succession to Imam Shams al Din Muhammad (d. c. 710/1310) split the line of
the Nizari imams and their followers into the Qasim Shahl and Muhammad
Shahl branches. The Muhammad Shahl Nizari imams transferred their seat to
India in the tenth/ sixteenth century, and by the end of the twelfth/ eighteenth

Varieties of Islam

this line had become discontinued. By the end of the eleventh/seventeenth
century the Qasim Shahi Nizari da'wa had been particularly successful in
Afghanistan, Central Asia and the Indian subcontinent. In South Asia the
converts became known as Khojas, who developed their own distinctive
tradition of Nizari Isma'Ilism, known as Satpanth (the 'true path'), as well as
a devotional literature, the ginans. The Qasim Shahi Nizari imams and com
munities have survived to the present time, and their last four imams have
enjoyed prominence under their hereditary title of the Aga Khan.

The Zaydis

Representing another major Shl'ite community, the general influence and
geographical distribution of the Zaydiyya, named after their fourth imam,
Zayd ibn 'All Zayn al Abidrn, have been more restricted than those of the
Twelvers and the Isma'llls. 11 The Zaydi branch of Shfism developed out of
Zayd ibn 'All's abortive revolt in 122/740. The movement was initially led by
Zayd's son Yahya, who escaped from Kufa to Khurasan and concentrated his
activities in that eastern region. Counted as one of the Zaydi imams, Yahya
was eventually tracked down by the Umayyads and killed in 125/743. The
Zaydis were later led by another of Zayd's sons, 'Isa (d. 166/783), and others
recognised as their imams. In early Abbasid times groups of Zaydis partici
pated in a number of abortive Alid revolts in the Hijaz and elsewhere. By the
middle of the third/ninth century the Zaydis had shifted their attention away

from Kufa and concentrated their activities in regions removed from the centres of 'Abbasid power, namely the Caspian region in northern Persia and Yemen, where two Zaydi states were soon founded.

The early Zaydis essentially retained the politically militant and religiously
moderate attitude prevailing among the early Kufan Shi'a. However, the Zaydiyya elaborated a doctrine of the imamate that clearly distinguished them from Imam! Shi'ism and its two subsequent branches, the Ithna 'Ashariyya and the Isma'iliyya. The Zaydis did not recognise a hereditary line of imams, nor did they attach any significance to the principle of the nass.
Initially they accepted any member of the ahl al bayt as an imam, though later
their imams were restricted to the Fatimid Alids. According to Zaydi doctrine,
if an imam wished to be recognised he would have to assert his claims publicly
in a rising (khuruj) sword in hand if necessary in addition to having

11 Our discussion of the Zaydiyya is based on Madelung's Der Imam al Qasim and his
numerous other studies.

131

The New Cambridge History of Islam

the required religious knowledge (Him). Many Zaydi imams were learned scholars and authors; and, in contrast to the Twelvers and the Isma'ilis, the
Zaydis also excluded under age males from the imamate. They also rejected
the eschatological idea of a concealed mahdi and his expected return. As a
result, messianic tendencies remained rather weak in Zaydi Shi'ism. Their
emphasis on activism also made the observance of taqiyya alien to Zaydi teachings. The Zaydis did, however, develop a doctrine ofhijra, the obligation
to emigrate from land dominated by unjust, non Zaydi rulers.

During the second /eighth century the Zaydis were doctrinally divided into
two main groups, the Batriyya and the Jarudiyya. Representing the moderate
faction of the early Zaydiyya, the Batriyya upheld the caliphates of Abu Bakr
and 'Umar. They held that though All was the most excellent (al afdal) of
Muslims to succeed the Prophet, the caliphates of his less excellent predeces
sors (al mafdul) were nevertheless valid, because 'All had pledged allegiance to
them. In the case of c Uthman the matter was more complicated; the Batriyya
either abstained from judgement or repudiated him for the last six years of his
rule. The Batriyya, by contrast to the Jarudiyya, did not ascribe any particular
religious knowledge to the ahl al bayt, or to the c Alids, and accepted the
knowledge transmitted in the Muslim community. They were closely affili
ated to the Kufan traditionist school and, with the latter's absorption into
Sunnism in the third/ninth century, the Batriyya Zaydi tradition also disap
peared. Thereafter the views of the Jarudiyya on the imamate prevailed in
Zaydi Shfism. The Jarudiyya adopted the more radical doctrinal views of the
Imamiyya.

By the fourth/tenth century Zaydi doctrine, influenced by Jarudi and
Mu'tazilite elements, had been largely formulated. The Zaydis were less
concerned than Imami Shi'a to condemn the early caliphs and the Muslim
community at large. They held that 'All, al Hasan and al Husayn had been
imams by designation (nass) of the Prophet. However, the designation had
been unclear and obscure (khafi or ghayr jalT), and its intended meaning could
be understood only through investigation. After al Husayn ibn c Ali the ima
mate could be claimed by any qualified descendant of al Hasan and al Husayn
who was prepared to launch an armed uprising (khumf) against the illegitimate
rulers and issue a formal summons (da'wa) for gaining the allegiance of the
people. Religious knowledge, ability to render independent ruling (ijtihad)
and piety were emphasised as the qualifications of the imam, in addition to his

[Alid descent. The imams were not generally considered as divinely protected
from error and sin (ma'sum), with the exception of the first three imams. The
list of the Zaydi imams has never been completely fixed, though many of them

132

Varieties of Islam

are unanimously accepted. There were, indeed, periods without any Zaydi
imam; and in practice at times there was more than one. Due to high
requirements in terms of religious learning the Zaydis often backed 'Arid
pretenders and rulers as summoners (dais) or imams with restricted status
(muhtasibiin or muqtasida), rather than as full imams (sabiqun).

In theology, the Kufan Zaydiyya, like the early Imamiyya, were predestin
arian and opposed to the Mu'tazila, but later developed close relations with
this rationalist school of kalam. By the fourth /tenth century the Zaydis had
adopted practically all the principal Mu'tazilite tenets, including one rejected
by the Twelvers and the Isma'ilis: the unconditional punishment of the
unrepentant sinner. In law, the Zaydis initially relied on the teachings of
Zayd ibn 'All himself and other 'Alid authorities. By the end of the third/
ninth century, however, four legal schools (madhhabs) had emerged on the
basis of the teachings of different Zaydi scholars, including Imam al Qasim ibn
Ibrahim al Rassi (d. 246/860), founder of the school later prevalent in Yemen
as well as among a faction of the Caspian Zaydis.

Zaydi doctrines were first effectively disseminated in Persia by some local
followers of al Rassi, who lived and taught on the Jabal al Rass near Medina.

As a result, al Rassi' s legal and theological teachings, which were partially in
agreement with Mu'tazilite tenets, were spread in western Tabaristan (today's
Mazandaran) in the Caspian region, known in medieval times as Daylam. In
250/864 the Hasanid al Hasan ibn Zayd led the local Daylamls in a revolt
against the region's Tahirid governor, who ruled on behalf of the 'Abbasids
and established the first Zaydi 'Alid state in Tabaristan with its capital at Amul.
On his death in 270/884 he was succeeded by his brother Muhammad ibn
Zayd. The two 'Alid brothers, who adopted the regnal title al Da'i ila'l Haqq
and were not generally recognised as full imams, supported Zaydi doctrine
and Mu'tazilite theology. The first period of Zaydi rule in Tabaristan ended in
287/900 when Muhammad ibn Zayd was killed in battle against the Samanids,
who restored their rule and Sunnism to Daylam.

In 301/914 Zaydi 'Alid rule was restored in Tabaristan by the Husaynid al
Hasan ibn 'All al Utrush, known as al Nasir li'l Haqq. He reigned until his death
in 304/917, and was succeeded by his vizier, the Hasanid al Hasan ibn al Qasim,
also known as al Da'i ila'l Haqq. Al Hasan had an eventful career and was
eventually killed in 316/928 by Mardavij ibn Ziyar (d. 323/935), the founder of
the Ziyarid dynasty of northern Persia. At the same time Tabaristan was invaded
by the Samanids, who once again ended Zaydi rule there. Al Nasir
had converted many Daylamls and GUIs, and was generally recognised as an
imam; it was also in his armies that the Buyids of Daylam had first risen

133

The New Cambridge History of Islam

to prominence. A learned scholar with numerous works on theology and law,
al Nasir's teaching differed somewhat from that of al Rassi; in particular, in ritual
and law he was close to the Kufan Zaydi tradition and to Imami doctrines. In
fact, al Nasir founded his own doctrinal school of Zaydi ShTism, known as the
Nasiriyya, in distinction from the older school of the Qasimiyya prevalent in
Daylam and later in Yemen. As a result, the Daylami Zaydis were thenceforth
divided into two rival factions: the Qasimiyya, concentrated in western
Tabaristan and Ruyan; and the Nasiriyya, in eastern Gilan and the interior of
Daylam. There was much antagonism between the two Zaydi communities,
which often supported different imams, da'is or amirs. Matters were further
complicated by ethnic differences and the close ties existing between the
Qasimiyya and the Zaydis of Yemen. Prolonged Zaydi sectarian hostilities
ceased in Daylam when around the middle of the fourth/ tenth century Abu
Abd Allah Muhammad al Mahdi liDrn Allah (d. 360/970), an imam of the
Qasimiyya, declared both doctrinal schools equally valid because they were
based on the ijtihad of legitimate imams. This ruling became generally accepted
by the Caspian Zaydis, who nevertheless remained divided in terms of their
adherence to the two schools.

In the mean time, after the collapse of the second Zaydi state of Tabaristan
in 316/928 under Samanid attacks, other Alid rulers had appeared in the
Caspian provinces. In 320/932 Hawsam, and later Lahijan in Gilan, became
the seats of the Zaydi Alid dynasty of the Tha'irids, who reigned as amirs
without claiming the Zaydi imamate, as well as other 'Alid rulers supporting
the Nasiriyya school. At the same time, a number of Alids recognised as Zaydi
imams by the Qasimiyya were active in Daylaman, with their seat at Langa.
The Zaydi imams belonging to the Qasimiyya branch espoused the theo
logical doctrines of the Basran school of Mu'tazilism. In the course of the
sixth/twelfth century the Caspian Zaydis lost much of their prominence to the
Nizari Isma'ilis, who had then successfully established themselves in

Daylaman with their seat at Alamut. Subsequently, the Zaydis, now restricted
mainly to eastern Gilan, were further weakened due to incessant factional
quarrels among different c Alid pretenders. However, minor c Alid dynasties
and Zaydi communities survived in Gilan and Daylaman until the tenth/
sixteenth century when the Zaydis of the Caspian provinces converted to
Twelver ShTism under Safavid rule over Persia. Thereafter Zaydi ShTism was
confined to Yemen.

In Yemen, Zaydi rule and imamate were founded in 284/897 by Imam
Yahya ibn al Husayn al HadI ila'l Haqq (d. 298/911), a Hasanid Alid and
grandson of al Qasim ibn Ibrahim al Rassi. With the help of the local tribes

134

Varieties of Islam

he established himself in Sa c da, in northern Yemen, which remained the strong
hold of Zaydl Shfism, da'wa and learning in Yemen. Concerning the imamate,
he adopted the radical ShTite and Jarudi position, condemning Abu Bakr and
'Umar as usurpers of 'All's rights. In his theology al Had! essentially supported
the contemporary doctrine of the Mu'tazilite school of Baghdad, while in law his
teaching was based on that of his grandfather Imam al Rassi with more specif
ically ShTite views, which were further elaborated by his sons, Muhammad al
Murtada (d. 310/922) and Ahmad al Nasir li Din Allah (d. 322/934), who were
consecutively recognised as imams. Al Hadi's legal teachings, collected and
further elaborated later, provided the foundation of the Hadawiyya legal school,

which became authoritative in parts of the Caspian Zaydl community while
serving as the only recognised school in Yemen.

The descendants of Imam al Hadi, after his two sons, quarrelled among themselves and failed to be acknowledged as imams, undermining Zaydl rule
in Yemen. In the fifth/eleventh century the Yemeni Zaydis experienced further problems due to two schismatic movements in their community. Earlier, in 389/999, the Zaydi imamate of the Rassid line had been reinstated
in Yemen by al Mansur bi'llah al Qasim al 'Iyam (d. 393/1003), another descendant of Imam al Rassi. However, al Mansur's son and successor al Husayn al Mahdi li Din Allah, also recognised as an imam, made the unusual
Zaydi claim of being the ShTite mahdi; when he was killed in battle in 404/1013
his partisans did, in fact, deny his death and awaited his return. These Zaydis
became known as the Husayniyya. Led by the descendants of al Mahdi, the
Husayniyya Zaydis had numerous confrontations with the Isma'ili Sulayhids
who ruled over parts of Yemen as vassals of the Fatimids. Later in the fifth/
eleventh century another splinter Zaydi sect, known as the Mutarrifiyya, appeared in Yemen. Its founder, Mutarrif ibn Shihab (d. after 459/1067), interpreted the Zaydi teachings of the earlier authorities and imams in an arbitrary fashion. As a result, serious discrepancies arose between the Mutarrifiyya views and the teachings of the contemporary Yemeni Zaydi imams, as well as those of the Caspian Qasimiyya Zaydis who espoused Basran Mu'tazilite doctrines. The Mutarrifiyya were also inclined towards pietism and asceticism, and founded numerous hijras or 'abodes of emigra
tion', where they engaged in worship and ascetic practices. The Husayniyya
and Mutarrifiyya sects disappeared by the ninth/fifteenth century.

The Zaydi imamate and its fortunes were briefly restored in Yemen by Ahmad ibn Sulayman al Mutawakkil (532 66/1138 71), who favoured the unity
of the Zaydiyya and recognised the Zaydi teachings of the Caspian authorities.
As a result, numerous Zaydi texts of Caspian provenance were brought to

135

Yemen. At the same time, certain Yemeni imams were now acknowledged by
the Caspian Zaydis. A key role was played in these unifying developments by
Shams al DInJa'far ibn Abl Yahya (d. 573/1177), a Zaydi jurist and scholar, who
founded a school holding that the Zaydi imams of the Caspian region were
equal in authority to those in Yemen.

The Zaydi imamate prevailed in Yemen even after the occupation of
southern Arabia by the Sunni Ayyubids in 569/1174, though the power of
the imams was now considerably restricted. The Yemeni Zaydis were at times
obliged to develop better relations with the Sunnis by modifiying some of
their own doctrines. For instance, Imam al Mu'ayyad bi'llah Yahya ibn Hamza
(729 47/1329 46) praised the early caliphs as the Companions of the Prophet
deserving respect equal to that due to 'All In later centuries, too, especially as
the Zaydi imams extended their rule to the predominantly Sunni lowlands of
Yemen, the Zaydis attempted to achieve a certain doctrinal rapport with their
Sunni subjects. In particular, they favoured the neo Sunni school that emerged
out of the teachings of Sayyid Muhammad ibn Ibrahim al WazTr (d. 840/1436).
On the other hand, the Yemeni Zaydis maintained their traditional hostility
towards the Sufis, even though a Zaydi school of Sufism was founded in
Yemen in the eighth/fourteenth century. They also had prolonged conflicts
with the Yemeni Ismalls, and wrote numerous polemical treatises refuting
their doctrines.

The final phase of the Zaydi imamate in Yemen started with al Mansur
bi'llah al Qasim ibn Muhammad (1006 29/1597 1620), the founder of the
Qasimi dynasty of imams who ruled over much of Yemen until modern

times. A warrior imam, al Mansur reaffirmed the Jarudi position of the
Zaydis on the imamate and pointed to certain divergencies between the
Zaydi and Mu'tazilite views; he also fought against the Ottoman
occupation
of Yemen (945 1045/ 1538 1636). However, it was his son and successor,
al
Mu'ayyad bi'llah Muhammad (1029 54/1620 44), who expelled the
Ottomans
from Yemen in 1045/ 1636. Thereafter San'a' served as the capital of an
independent Zaydi state and imamate for more than two centuries until
1289/1872, when Yemen once again became an Ottoman province. The
later
Qasimi Zaydi imams ruled over Yemen on a purely dynastic basis (until
1382/
1962), though still claiming the title of imam.

The Nusayris or 'Alawis

A Shi'ite community with syncretic doctrines, the Nusayriyya, who were
initially also called the NamTriyya, retained the traditions of the early
Shi'ite

136

Varieties of Islam

ghulat. The origins of the Nusayris may be traced to a certain Imami
ghali,
Muhammad ibn Nusayr al Narnrri (d. 270/883), who was a supporter of
the
tenth and eleventh Twelver imams and also enjoyed some favour at the
Abbasid court in Baghdad. Ibn Nusayr was particularly close to the
eleventh
imam, al Hasan al c Askari (d. 26o/873f.) and, according to Nusayri
tradition,
was entrusted with a new revelation by him. Not much more is known
about
the eponymous founder of the Nusayriyya other than that he deified the

imams and professed metempsychosis (tanasukh), which has an important
function in Nusayri cosmogony. After Ibn Nusayr, the sect founded by him
continued to grow under other leaders such as Muhammad ibn Jundab and
Abd Allah al Junbulani al Jannan (d. 287/900), who was of Persian origin and
was possibly responsible for incorporating the Persian festivals of the spring
and autumn equinoxes, Nawruz and Mihragan, into Nusayri rituals, cele
brated as the days when the divinity of 'All is manifested in the sun.

Abu Abd Allah al Husayn ibn Hamdan al Khasibi (d. c. 346/957), who initially
led the sect in the Baghdad ShTite suburb of Karkh and was also a poet at the
Buyid court, was the person responsible for propagating the Nusayri doctrines
in northern Syria, the permanent stronghold of the community. The author of
numerous works, he dedicated his Kitab al hidaya al kubra (Book of the great
guidance) to Sayf alDawla (r. 333 56/944 67), the ShTite Hamdanid amir of
Aleppo. In 423 / 1032 al Khaabfs grandson and student Abu Sa c id Maymun ibn al
Qasim al Tabarani (d. 426/1034^ left Aleppo for Ladhiqiyya (Laodicea) in the
northern coastal region of Syria, then still under Byzantine domination. Al
Tabarani became the real founder of the Nusayri community and teachings; his
numerous writings account for the bulk of the Nusayri sacred scriptures. As a
result of the efforts of al Tabarani and his disciples, the rural inhabitants of the
Syrian coastal mountain range converted to Nusayrism.

The later medieval history of the Nusayris is rather obscure. They had
encounters with the Frankish Crusaders who established themselves in the
northern part of the Jabal Ansariyya (today known as Jabal al Alawiyytn),
the heartland of the community. They also had prolonged conflicts with the
Nizarl Isma'llls, who by the middle of the sixth/twelfth century had acquired a
network of fortresses in the same area. In 584/1188, following Saladin's capture

of Ladhiqiyya and a number of fortresses in the region, Jabal Ansariyya was
incorporated into the Ayyubid sultanate. By 622/1225 the Nusayris had
appealed for help to some Bedouin tribes of the Jabal Sinjar to repel Isma'IlI
attacks. Thereupon, a number of these tribes settled in the Jabal Ansariyya and
later evolved into the Nusayri tribes of the Haddadiyya, Matawira and others.
In Mamluk times both Baybars and Qalawun unsuccessfully attempted to

The New Cambridge History of Islam

convert the Nusayris to Sunni Islam. Soon afterwards the famous Hanbali
jurist Ibn Taymiyya (d. 728/1328) issued afatwa against the Nusayris, describ
ing them as more heretical than even idolaters, and authorising jihad against
them. The Mamluks also made efforts to destroy Nusayri books and confiscate
their properties. Under the Ottomans, however, the Nusayris were recognised
as a distinct group with their own judicial practices. Intent on emphasising
their Shfite roots, in the 1340s /1920s the Nusayris, situated in Syria, Lebanon
and south eastern Turkey, changed their name to c AlawIs.

The Nusayris or Alawls are a secretive community, observing taqiyya and
guarding their literature and doctrines closely. Even within the community
the Nusayri teachings are accessible only to the initiated members (khassa), as
distinct from the uninitiated masses ('amma); women are excluded from the
process. At the basis of the Nusayri complex religious system of thought is a
cosmogony. Nusayris also believe in metempsychosis (tanasukh) and incarna

tion (hulul) of the divine essence (ma'na) in certain historical and mythical
figures as well as the imams. The Nusayri religion indeed draws on pre Islamic, Christian and Islamic traditions (both Sunni and Shi'ite). They also
resort to allegorical interpretation (ta^wil) of the Qur'an. Central in this system
of thought is the deification and exclusiveness of All ibn Abl Talib. Aspects of
Nusayri teachings are to be found in the Kitab al haft wa'l azilla (Book of the
heptad and the shadows), a Mufaddali Nusayri text preserved by the Isma'llls,
who recruited converts from the Nusayri community in the sixth /twelfth century.

Espousing a cyclical view of history, the Nusayris hold that the deity has been manifested in seven eras (akwar or adwar), each time in the form of a
trinity. In each case, two entities or persons emanate from the divine essence
(ma'na), namely ism, the Name (or hijab, the Veil), and bab, the Gate. In each
era the ma'na is veiled by the presence of ism or hijab, representing the prophets from Adam to Muhammad. Each prophet is, in turn, accompanied
by a bab, the gate through which the believer may contemplate the mystery of
divinity. In the seventh and final era, that of Islam, the divine trinity is represented by 'All as ma'na, Muhammad as ism or hijab and Salman al Farisi
as bab. In Nusayri thought this trinity is designated symbolically by 'ayn mim
sin', standing for the first letters of the names 'All, Muhammad and Salman and
functioning as the primary initiatory expression of the Nusayris. Later the
deity was manifested in the imams and their disciples. For instance, Ibn Nusayr himself is regarded as the bab of the eleventh Ithna 'Ashari imam, al
Hasan al 'Askari, whose secret revelation was preserved exclusively for the
Nusayris. The syncretic nature of the Nusayri religion is also reflected in the

Varieties of Islam

Nusayri calendar of festivals rooted in different local, Persian, Christian and
Islamic traditions, which are often interpreted allegorically.

The Kharijites

Representing one of the earliest schismatic movements in Islam, the original
Kharijites (Khawarij) may be identified as those who seceded from 'All's army
in protest against his arbitration agreement with Mu'awiya after the battle of
Sifffn in 37/657. They were initially also called the Haruriyya, after the locality
(Harura 1) near Kufa to which the first seceders had retreated, as well as the
Shurat (sing. Shari, 'the vendor'), signifying those who sold their souls for the
cause of God. Seriously opposed to both Sunni and Shi'ite Islam, to 'Uthman
and Mu'awiya as well as 'All, the Kharijites organised a rapidly spreading
movement, comprised of numerous branches and sects, that many times in
the later history of Islam challenged any form of dynastic rule. Only the Ibad
iyya (or Abadiyya), the most moderate branch of the Kharijites, as well as their
literature, have survived, and Ibadi communities are still to be found in Oman,
East Africa and southern Algeria. The heresiographers with their biases
provide the main source of information on non Ibadi Kharijites.

The Kharijites did not have a uniform body of doctrine. But they were
uncompromising in their application of the Islamic theocratic principle hold
ing that judgement belongs to God alone' (la hukma ilia li'Eah), after which
they were also called the Muhakkima. Even caliphs or imams must observe
this principle as embodied in the Qur'an. If they deviate in any sense from the

right conduct, they must repent or be removed, if necessary by force, notwithstanding their previous meritorious behaviour and services to Islam.

The unjust imam, who has thus lost his legitimacy, and his partisans are all

considered infidels. Any Muslim who fails to dissociate himself (bara'a) openly

from them shares their state of infidelity. Similarly, Muslims who do not declare their solidarity (walaya) with the just imams, such as Abu Bakr, 'Umar

and imams recognised by the Kharijites, are infidels. In their view both 'Uthman and 'Ali became infidels, though they had initially ruled legitimately;

'Uthman during the first six years of his caliphate and 'Ali until his acceptance

of the arbitration. Their emphasis on right conduct, which would guarantee

the believer's salvation, led to continuous factionalism within the Kharijite

movement. According to general Kharijite doctrine the establishment of the

imamate is obligatory on the community, and the imam is to be elected. Any

qualified Muslim could be elected as the legitimate imam deserving of the title

commander of the faithful (amir al mu'minin). The imam's qualifications were

139

The New Cambridge History of Islam

related to his religious merit rather than any legitimist principles or hereditary

attributes. Among these qualifications, special emphasis was placed on his

moral austerity as well as his duty to 'command right and prohibit wrong'; he

was also expected to lead the jihad against the non Kharijite Muslims.

The Kharijites were originally concentrated in Kufa, where they survived

until early Abbasid times. However, they soon established their stronghold in
Basra, where they organised numerous revolts. Kharijite activities assumed
serious dimensions after the second civil war in Islam, following Yazid's death
in 64/683, and also spread to Persia and the eastern regions. Meanwhile, the
Islamic egalitarianism of the Khawarij had drawn the mawali to their move
ment. In the event, large numbers of the Azariqa, a major Kharijite sect in
Basra, sought refuge in Persia and became active in Fars, Kirman and other
provinces there. Named after their leader, Nafi c ibn al Azraq al Hanafi, the
Azariqa represented the most radical sect of the Khawarij. They subscribed to
the principle of istfrad (religious murder) and held the killing of the women
and children of non Kharijite Muslims licit, also considering as polytheists
(mushrikuri) even those Kharijites who did not join them. Meanwhile, the
Najdiyya Kharijites, who repudiated some of the more radical views of the
Azariqa, were mainly active in Arabia. The Kharijites who refused to join
them were considered only as hypocrites (munafiqun); thus they were not to
be killed. Unlike the Azariqa, who condemned taqiyya, the Najdiyya also
permitted this practice. The Ajarida, a sub sect of the Najdiyya with its own
numerous groups, were active in Khurasan and other regions of the eastern
Iranian world. By the end of the third/ninth century the Kharijites as an
insurrectional movement had practically disappeared from Persia and Iraq.
Thenceforth Kharijism survived in its moderate forms in the remoter corners
of the Islamic world, notably in North Africa and eastern Arabia.

The moderate wing of Kharijism was represented by the Sufriyya, who
have not survived, and the Ibadiyya, with its own internal divisions. In
contrast to the Azariqa, the Ibadiyya considered other Muslims as well as
the sinners of their own community as 'infidels by ingratitude' (kuffar ni'ma)
rather than polytheists (mushrikun); therefore they rejected their murder. It
was also licit to intermarry with them. The practice of isti'rad was, however,

authorised by Abu Yazid Makhlad ibn Kaydad (d. 336/947), one of the imams
of the Nukkari sub sect of the Ibadiyya who was also involved in a long,
drawn out conflict with the Fatimid rulers of North Africa. Earlier the
Fatimids had uprooted the Ibadi imamate and principality of the Rustamids
of Tahert in the Maghrib. However, the success of Ibadi Kharijism among the
Berbers of North Africa proved lasting.

140

Varieties of Islam

The Ibadiyya were also less involved than other Kharijite communities in
armed rebellions. The Ibadis produced eminent scholars and played an
important role in the elaboration of religious scholarship in early Islam. All
this contributed to the survival of the Ibadi Kharijites in the Muslim world.
Since the middle of the second/ eighth century the Ibadi Kharijites have had
another imamate and stronghold in eastern Arabia, and they have ruled
intermittently over various parts of Oman. Many members of the Ya'rubid
and Al Bu Sa'id dynasties of Oman and East Africa were, in fact, acknowledged
as Ibadi imams. After Sa c id ibn Ahmad (d. c. 1226/1811), however, the Bu Sa'idi
sultans of Oman styled themselves sayyids rather than imams.

141

4

Islamic law: history and transformation

WAEL B. HALLAQ

Introduction

If we must refer to the shaft a as Islamic law', then we must do so with
considerable caution. The latter expression bears a connotation that
combines
modern notions of law with a particular brand of modern politics, both of
which
were largely if not entirely absent from the original landscape of the
shaft a
we are considering here. Throughout the last three or four centuries
European
modernity has produced legal systems and legal doctrines that are
almost
exclusively the preserve of the equally modern nation state. Intrinsic to
its
behaviour, the modern state is systemically and systematically geared
towards
the transformation and homogenisation of both the social order and the
national
citizen, features that have a direct bearing on law. To accomplish these
goals the
state engages in systemic surveillance, discipline and punishment. Its
educational
and cultural institutions, among others, are designed to manufacture the
citizen
who is respectful of law, submissive to notions of order and discipline,
indus
trious and economically productive. Without the law and its tools of
surveil
lance and punishment, no state apparatus can exist. Ergo the centrality,
in the
definition and concept of the state, of the element of violence, and of the
state's
exclusive right to threaten its use.

Now, this vision of the law perforce permeates our notions of what it, as
a
species, represents. Yet one would immediately misrepresent both the
modus
vivendi and modus operandi of the shaft a should such modern
assumptions be
allowed to partake in its definition. The misrepresentation may further be

aggravated by the fundamental modern separation between law and morality,
which the shaft a 'lacked' and which has for long been deemed one of its
shortcomings. 1 To this important point I shall return in due course.

i On the modern splits into fact/value and moral/legal in the context of shafi'a see Wael
Hallaq, 'Groundwork of the moral law: A new look at the Qur'an and the genesis of
sharfa', Islamic Law and Society, 17, 1 (forthcoming, 2010), esp. section II.

142

Islamic law

The differences, noted above, between the law of the modern state and the
sharfa suggest that, prior to the dawn of modernity, the sharfa coexisted with
a body politic far weaker than the modern state, lacking the characteristics of
the latter, including corporate identity, a public welfare apparatus, a universal
administrative and bureaucratic control, surveillance and law making. With
the encroachments of modernity on the Muslim world during the nineteenth
and twentieth centuries, the sharfa was first gradually absorbed and later
largely destroyed by the modern Muslim nation states, leaving remnants of it
(mainly in the sphere of personal status) to be remoulded in a fashion that
served those states' imperatives, mainly in the cause of social engineering. 2
The new states and societies that have now emerged in the Muslim world lack
nearly all the fundamental attributes that characterised the weaker pre
modern states and traditional societies in which the sharfa had operated

and, indeed, taken as a premise for its functioning. Not only such aspects of
it as family law, but even criminal law, have been dramatically refashioned and
appropriated by the modern state for political gain, particularly for garnering
the much coveted mantle of political legitimacy. This appropriation was
concomitant with a structural transformation in the meaning of sharfa, now
regarded as a body of texts and as an uncompromising deontology almost
entirely severed from the anthropological and sociological backgrounds that
sustained its functioning throughout a millennium before the rise of modern
ity. This is to say that one of the chief effects of this transformation was the
subjection of the sharfa to a process of 'entexting', a process that began in
British India and continued unrelentingly under the nationalist regimes after
independence. 3 Stripped of its traditional anthropological, sociological and
institutional underpinnings (which defined how traditional substantive law
was modulated and applied in social contexts, and in turn how these contexts
allowed this law to assume the existence of a moral community), the sharfa
has become an entexted and codified law, existing within modern state legal
structures and without the traditional checks and balances that the moral
community had afforded.

Yet another modern transformation, intimated above, occurred through
the introduction of a line of separation between law and morality. 4 Since the
sharfa was seen as having failed to distinguish conceptually between the two

2 For a detailed analysis see Wael B. Hallaq, Sharia: Theory, practice, transformations
(Cambridge, 2009), chap. 16.

3 On the processes and significance of 'entexting' the sharfa see Wael B. Hallaq, 'What is
Sharia?', Yearbook of Islamic and Middle Eastern Law, zoo; 2006, vol. XII
(Leiden, 2007).

4 Hallaq, 'Groundwork of the moral law', section II.

and to separate them in practice, the legislatures of the modern Muslim
nation states as well as individual legal thinkers and reform minded
Muslims
followed colonialist policies and orientalist understanding in enhancing
the
segregation of the two spheres. Among the consequences of this
segregation
has been the rise of the modern distinction between Hbadat and
mu'amalat, the
former referring to worship and ritual belonging to the 'domain of God'
and
the latter referring to the properly' legal transactions between and
among
social individuals. Known and acknowledged by jurists for centuries, the
distinction now acquired an entirely new meaning deriving from the
European separation between the private and public spheres. Belief in
God
became a private matter, having almost nothing to do with the state and
its
positive law, both of which regulate the social sphere. For the first time
in
history, the shari'a in many modern Muslim countries was made to
conform
to the maxim 'give to God what is to God, and to Caesar what is to
Caesar'.

The modern segregation of the 'ritual' from the 'legal' has been a
function
of overlooking the moral force of the law, a failure to appreciate both the
legal
ramifications of Hbadat rituals and the moral ramifications of those
'strictly
legal' provisions of mu'amalat. While this fluid interchange ability
between the

moral and the legal could never obtain in modern law, it was the cornerstone
ofsharVa and its functioning in the social order; which is to say that the failure,
if not deliberate, was necessary and inevitable in a process in which the modern state, by its very nature, had to assume the role of an amoral lawgiver.

But the traditional technical separation between Hbadat and mu'amalat had
an entirely different function, one that in fact underscored the importance of
the moral for that which we now regard as strictly legal. Traditionally, fiqh
books (containing both substantive and procedural law) begin their exposition
with five chapters or 'books' (kutub; sing, kitab), reflecting, in strict order, four
out of the five pillars of Islam, 5 the arkan, on which fundamental religious
beliefs rested. These books discuss (a) ritual purification (tahara), which was
preparatory and a prerequisite for (b) performance of prayer (salat); (c) pay
ment of alms tax (zakat); (d) performance of pilgrimage (hajj); and (e) fasting
(sawm). The priority of these 'ritualistic' books in the overall corpus of the law
is reflected in their universal placement at the beginning, a long standing tradition that no jurist appears to have violated. Furthermore, they often

5 The fifth, which is in fact first in order, is the shahada (testimony) or double shahada,
namely, that 'there is no god but God and that Muhammad is the messenger of God'.
This double shahada did not receive coverage in legal works, as its implications were
strictly theological. For more on these implications see Wael B. Hallaq, 'Fashioning the
moral subject: Sharia's technologies of the self, unpublished MS.

144

occupy as much as one quarter to one third of the entire body of these
treatises. Their placement was not merely of symbolic importance; it had a
function that made this ritualistic grouping a logical and functional antece
dent. The function was subliminal, programmatic and deeply psychological, 7
fashioning the moral subject and laying the foundations for achieving willing
obedience to the law that followed that is, the regulations affecting, among
much else, persons and property. The legal treatises, depending on the school
and the jurist, continue their exposition with either contractual and pecuniary
subjects (such as sales, agency, pledge, partnerships, rent etc.) or family law
(marriage, various forms of marital dissolution, custody, maintenance, inher
itance etc.). Following these rules one usually finds sections dealing with
offences against life and limb, some regulated by the Qur'an (hudud), and
others by principles of retaliation or monetary compensation (qisas). The last
sections of legal works usually treat adjudication and rules of evidence and
procedure, and often include an exposition of jihad (law of war and peace),
although in some schools or juristic writings this section appears earlier in the
treatise. It bears repeating that, whatever the arrangement of books within the
treatises, the materials dedicated to the elaboration of so called rituals always
come first, having universal precedence over all else.

lfshari l a is divine guidance, then this guidance had to be as much imbued
with morality as legality, which is to say that all capable Muslim individuals
(mukallafs) were required to do what is right (as opposed to what is strictly
legal). Accordingly, the shari'a came to organise human acts into various
categories, ranging from the moral to the legal, without however making

such distinctions in either a conscious or typological manner. In fact, there are
no words in Arabic, the lingua franca of the law, for the contrastive modern
notions of moral /legal. Thus, conforming to any of five norms, all acts are
regarded as shafx (i.e. subject to the regulation of the sharfa and therefore
pronounced as law, in its jural cum moral sense). The norm or category of the
forbidden (haram) entails punishment upon commission of an act deemed
prohibited, while that of the obligatory (wajib) demands punishment upon
omission of an act whose performance is decreed legally necessary. Breach of
contract or committing adultery, not to mention uprooting trees or hunting
within the Meccan sanctuary, are just some of the infractions falling within the

6 However, the Malikls add to these five a chapter on jihad, discussed by the other schools
usually towards the end of their books. For the Malikls see Jamal al Din ibn 'Umar ibn al
Hajib,]ami' al ummahat, ed. Abu Abd al Rahman al Akhdari (Damascus and Beirut, 1421/
2000), pp. 243ft".

7 On the function of these books see Hallaq, 'Fashioning the moral subject'.

145

The New Cambridge History of Islam

haram category, while prayer and payment of pecuniary debts are instances
of the wajib. Both categories require punishment upon non compliance, while

the diametrical, ungraded opposition of punishable /non punishable deprives
the individual of any freedom of action or choice. The distinctly punitive
outlook embedded in these two categories initially led several modern schol
ars to the notion, now a century old, that the sharfa qualifies and acts as 'law'
only when rules belonging to these two categories are involved ('law' here is,
of course, essentially assumed to be a positive system of rules). The three
remaining categories the recommended (mandiib), the neutral (mubah) and
the disapproved (makruh) do not, in the view of this scholarship, constitute
law proper, as they do not possess any truly coercive or punitive content. In
other words they are said to be unenforceable, since commission of the
disapproved and non commission of the recommended do not entail punish
ment in any real sense. Instead, their omission and commission, respectively,
entail a reward, assumed to await the individual in the hereafter. Similarly, the
category of the neutral prescribes neither permission nor prohibition, leaving
the choice entirely up to the preferences of the individual. The neutral, it must
be stressed, is a strictly legal category rather than an area in which the shar7a
failed, or did not care, to regulate human acts. Put differently, categorising an
act as neutral is both a deliberate choice and a conscious commitment not to
assign particular values to particular acts.

The punitive character of the obligatory and forbidden and the absence of
this quality from the other three categories conflate any distinction between
the moral and strictly legal, for the distinction was never perceived as integral
to the law. Indeed, the categories of the recommended and the disapproved
do entail punitive consequences, where applicable, though these are not of the
earthly kind. That they are entirely theological and eschatological does not
consign them a place outside the law. Divine punishment is horrendous and

eternally painful, to an extent and quality that cannot even be imagined by the
human mind. But for the petty, and not so petty, wrongdoers, God is forgiving
and merciful. Not only can many bad deeds be forgiven, but good deeds are
rewarded manifold and have, in their overall weight, an offsetting effect
against bad deeds. The reward is thus exponential. Doing good and perform
ing beneficial deeds increases one's credit, meticulously noted in a believer's
transcendental ledger. Thus, to do good is by definition to be 'near God'
(qurba) in this life and in the hereafter, to be loved and in receipt of His grace
and bounty. The pronouncement 'there is no god but God' ultimately

ibid.

146

Islamic law

epitomises, but does not mask, the totality of these relationships with the
Creator, in their threat and promise. 9 That shaft a norms engendered willing
obedience, where the inner sources of the self willingly generate actions that are
at once moral and legal, is perhaps the most striking difference between what
we call Islamic law and the law of the modern state.

It is with these caveats in mind that we now turn to discuss the shaffa's
history and some of the salient ways of its functioning.

Formation

By the end of the sixth century CE Mecca and its northern neighbour, Yathrib, had known a long history of settlement and were largely a part of the cultural continuum that had dominated the Near East since the time of the Sumerians. True, the two cities were not direct participants in the imperial cultures that prevailed elsewhere in the Near East, but they were tied to them in more ways than one. Prior to the Arab expansion in the name of Islam, Arabian society had developed the same types of institutions and forms of culture that were established in the societies to the south and north, a development that would later facilitate the Arab conquest of this region.

Through intensive contacts with the Lakhmids and Ghassanids and with their Arab predecessors who dominated the Fertile Crescent for a century or more before the rise of Islam, the Arabs of the Peninsula maintained forms of culture that were their own, but which represented a regional variation on the cultures of the north. The Bedouin themselves participated in these cultural forms, but the sedentary and agricultural settlements of the Hijaz were even more dynamic participants in the commercial and religious activities of the Near East. Through trade, missionary activities and connections with northern tribes (and hence constant shifting of demographic boundaries) the inhabitants of the Hijaz knew Syria and Mesopotamia quite as well as the inhabitants of the latter knew the Hijaz. When the new Muslim state began its expansion to the north, north west and north east it did not enter these territories empty handed, desperately in search of new cultural forms or an identity. Rather, the conquering Arabs, led by a sophisticated leadership hailing from commercial and sedentary Medina and Mecca, were very much products of the same culture that dominated what was to become their subject territories. 10

9 Ibid.

io For a detailed discussion of the place of Arabia in Near Eastern culture see Wael
B. Hallaq, The origins and evolution of Islamic law (Cambridge, 2005),
pp. 8 28.

The earliest military campaigns and conquests, although not systematic, were geared towards major centres. The Muslim armies consisted primarily of
tribal nomads and semi nomads who, rather than take up residence in the
newly won cities of the Fertile Crescent, Egypt and Iran, for the most part
inhabited garrison towns iamsaf) as a separate class of conquerors. Kufa and
Basra in southern Iraq and Fustat in Egypt constituted the chief settlements at
the early stage of the conquests.

It did not escape the Muslim political leaders of Medina, the capital, or their
military representatives in the garrison towns, that their warriors needed to
learn the principles of the new order, its new ethic and world view. Tribal Bedouins to the core, most soldiers found alien the military organisation to
which they were subjected, and by which their freedom was constrained. Even more alien to them must have been the new ideas of Islam, its mode of
operation and its generally non tribal conception, if not organisation. 'Umar I
(r. 13 23/634 44) quickly realised that it was not sufficient to appease the largely Bedouin contingents in his armies through allocations of booty.

Thus, in each garrison town, and in every locale where there happened to be a Muslim population, a mosque was erected. 11 This place of worship was to
serve several functions for the emerging Muslim community, but at the outset
it was limited mainly to bringing together the Muslims residing in the garrison
town for the Friday prayer and sermon both intended, among other things,
to imbue the Bedouin with religious values. The sermon, which played an important role in the propagation of the new Islamic ethic, included extensive
passages from the Qur] an and other messages that were relevant, in the emerging religious ethos, to the living experience of the Muslim community
in the garrisons.

To each of these towns 'Umar I appointed a military commander cum administrator who also functioned as propagator of the new religious ideas
that were gradually but steadily taking hold. The commander also led the Friday prayer, distributed booty pensions and commanded military cam paigns. His duties also involved the resolution and arbitration of conflicts that arose between and among the tribesmen inhabiting the garrison town.
'Umar was also quick to deploy Qur'an teachers who enhanced the religious
values propagated by the commanders and their assistants. 12

11 R. G. Hoyland, Seeing Islam as others saw it: A survey and evaluation of Christian, Jewish and
Zoroastrian writings on early Islam (Princeton, 1997), pp. 56iff., 567 73, 639.

12 Abu Ishaq Ibrahim al Shirazi, Tabaqat alfuqahS.\ ed. I. 'Abbas (Beirut, 1970), pp. 44, 51;
M. Ibn Hibban, Kitab al thiqat (Hyderabad, 1968), pp. 149, 157.

148

Islamic law

In the spirit of the Qur'an, and in accordance with what he deemed to have
been the intended mission of the Prophet (to which he himself had contributed
significantly), 'Umar I promulgated a number of ordinances and regulations
pertaining to state administration, family, crime and ritual. He regulated,
among other things, punishment for adultery and theft, declared temporary
marriage (mut'a) illegal and granted rights to concubines who bore the children
of their masters. Similarly, he upheld Abu Bakr's (r. n 13/632 4) promulgations,
such as enforcing the prohibition on alcohol and fixing the penalty for its
consumption. 13 He is also reported to have insisted forcefully on adherence to
the Qur'an in matters of ritual and worship a policy that culminated in a set of
practices and beliefs that were instrumental in shaping the new Muslim identity,
and that later became, as we saw, integral to the law. Combined with the public
policies of the new order, the Qur'an' s injunctions represented a significant
modification to the customary laws prevailing among the peninsular Arabs,
laws that contained indigenous tribal elements and, to a considerable extent,
legal provisions that had been applied in the urban cultures of the Near East
including the cities of the Hijaz for over a millennium.

From the very beginning of the conquests the military commander or,
more frequently, his assistant functioned, among other things, in the
capacity of qadi, whose duties entailed far more provincial administration
than law and whose involvement in the latter did not go beyond the experi
ence of having served as arbitrators (hakams). These arbitrators were men
deemed to possess sufficient experience, wisdom and charisma and to whom
tribesmen resorted for the adjudication of disputes. Although their verdicts
were not binding in the strict legal sense, disputants normally conformed to

their findings. Their appointments as qadls were neither general in jurisdiction
nor intended to regulate and supervise the affairs of the conquered provinces;
rather, they were confined to the garrison towns where the conquering Arab
armies resided with their families and other members of their tribes. 14 The
policy of the central power in Medina, and later in Damascus, was clear on this
matter from the outset: the conquered communities were to regulate their
own affairs exacdy as they had been doing prior to the advent of Islam, a
situation that continued to obtain until the thirteenth/nineteenth century.

With the passage of time, when the occupying populations permanently
settled in the garrison towns, their life acquired its own complexity, giving rise

13 'Abd al Gham ibn Abd al Wahid al Jamma'ili, al 'Umdafi a\ ahkam, ed. M. Ata' (Beirut,
1986), p. 463.

14 Abu Zur'a al Dimashqi, Tankh, ed. S. Allah al Qawjam, 2 vols, (n.p.,
1970), vol. I, p. 202.

to problems that called for a much wider range and technically more complex
set of laws. During this initial stage of legal development, the qadis
were instrumental. Despite the lack of organised legal education they were
expected, if not required, at least to have a degree of religious knowledge. At
the time this meant possessing a reasonable knowledge of the legal stipulations

of the Qur] an plus knowledge of the rudimentary socio religious values the
new religion had developed. This would be coupled with a proficient knowl
edge of customary law an element taken for granted, then and for centuries
thereafter.

The early qadis did not apply Qur'anic law systematically, although there was
a growing tendency to do so from the beginning. The application of Islamic
content to the daily life of the community came after the articulation of a certain
ethic, depending on the particular sphere of life or the case at hand. In matters of
inheritance, for instance, where the Qur'an offered clear and detailed provisions,
the proto qadis seem to have applied these provisions as early as the caliphates of
Abu Bakr and c Umar I. Government policy insisted on a faithful adherence to
the Qur'anic stipulations on inheritance (although we do not know the extent to
which these rules were applied in areas distant from the centres of government
power). On the other hand, many areas of life were either lightly touched by
Qur'anic legislation or not at all. Even such Qur'anic prohibitions as those
pertaining to wine drinking were not immediately enforced, and remained
largely inoperative at least for several decades after the death of the Prophet.

It was the second generation of Muslims, those raised during the second
half of the first/seventh century, who came under a more systematic influence
of Qur'anic teachings and religious instruction. Unlike their parents, who had
become Muslims at a later stage in their lives, often under coercion (by virtue
of the apostasy wars), they, together with the children of non Arab converts,
imbibed from infancy the rudimentary religious morality and values. By the
time they reached the age of majority they were frequent mosque goers (i.e.
regular consumers of religious preaching and religious acculturation), and

were involved in various activities relating to the conquests and building of a
religious empire. It was therefore the learned elite of this generation which
flourished roughly between 60/680 and 90/708 who embarked upon
promoting a religious ethos that permeated indeed, impregnated so
much of Muslim life and society. A useful gauge of the upsurge of a religious
ethos is the qadis' interest in religious narrative, including stories and bio
graphical anecdotes about the Prophet. Already in the 60s /680s, if not earlier,
some qadis had started propounding Prophetic material, the precise nature of
which is still unclear to us.

Islamic law

That legal authority during the better part of the first Islamic century was not
exclusively Prophetic is clear. It must be remembered that by the time
Muhammad died his authority as Prophet was anchored in the Qur'anic event
and in the fact that he was God's spokesman the one through whom this event
materialised. To his followers he was and remained nothing more than a human
being, devoid of any divine attributes (unlike Christ, for instance). But by the
time of his death, when his mission had already met with great success, he was
the most important figure the Arabs knew. Nonetheless, these Arabs also knew
of the central role that 'Umar I, Abu Bakr and a number of other Companions
had played in helping the Prophet, even in contributing to the success of
the new religion. Like him they were charismatic men who commanded the

respect of the faithful. Inasmuch as Muhammad's authority derived from the
fact that he upheld the Qur'anic Truth and never swerved from it, these men
derived their own authority as privileged Companions and, in some cases, caliphs from the same fact, namely, their upholding of the Qur'anic Truth.
This is not to say that caliphal authority was necessarily or entirely derivative
from that of the Prophet; in fact, it ran parallel to it. Muhammad was the messenger through whom the Qur'anic Truth was revealed; the caliphs were
the defenders of this Truth and the ones who were to implement its decrees.

The caliphs until at least the middle of the second/ eighth century tended to see themselves as God's direct agents in the mission to implement
His statutes, commands and laws. Throughout the entirety of the first Islamic
century they adjudicated many issues that required authority statement sol
utions, without invoking Prophetic authority. As late as the 90s /710s, and for
some decades thereafter, they and most other qadis appear to have relied on
three sources of authority in framing their rulings: the Qur'an; the sunan (including 'caliphal law'); and what we will call here considered opinion (ra'y).
The qadis' practice of writing letters seeking caliphal opinion on difficult cases
confronting them in their courts was evidently a common one. So were caliphal letters to the qadis, most of which appear to have been solicited, although some were written on the sole initiative of the caliph himself or presumably in his name, by his immediate advisers.

Yet much of caliphal legal authority rested on precedent, generally accepted
custom and the practice of earlier caliphs, of the Prophet's close Companions
and, naturally, of the Prophet himself. Like their qadis, caliphs adhered to the
same sources of legal guidance. And when no precedent was to be found, considered opinion adjudged. In short, the sources of authority that governed
the emerging Islamic law were three: the Qur'an, the sunan and considered
opinion.

The New Cambridge History of Islam

Surma (pi. sunan) is an ancient Arab concept, meaning an exemplary mode
of conduct, and the verb sanna has the connotation of 'setting or fashioning a
mode of conduct as an example that others would follow'. Many caliphal
practices came to constitute sunan since they were viewed as commendable.
When caliphs and proto qadis referred to sunan they were speaking of actions
and norms that were regarded as ethically binding but which may have
referred to various types of conduct.

During the first decades of Islam it became customary to refer to the
Prophet's biography and the events in which he was involved as his sua,
which constituted a normative, exemplary model, overlapping with notions of
Prophetic model behaviour, namely, sunna. The Qur'an itself explicitly and
repeatedly enjoins believers to obey the Prophet and to emulate his actions.
That the Prophet was associated with a sunna very soon after, if not upon or
before, his death cannot be doubted. Yet it stood as one among many sunan,
however increasingly important it was coming to be. In the hundreds of
biographical notices devoted to the early qadis by Muslim historians, it is
striking that Prophetic sunna surfaces relatively infrequently certainly no
more frequently than those of Abu Bakr and 'Umar I.

During the 6os/68os a number of qadis, among others, began to transmit
Prophetic material, technically referred to by the later sources as hadith. This
activity of transmission is significant because it marks the beginning of a trend in
which the sunna of the Prophet received special attention, independent of other

sunan. This very attention constituted an unprecedented and fundamental trans
formation. It was both the result of a marked growth in the Prophet's authority
and the cause of further epistemic and pedagogical developments. The develop
ments were epistemic because the need to know what the Prophet said or did
became increasingly crucial for determining what the law was. In addition to the
fact that Prophetic sunna like other sunan was already central to the
Muslims' perception of model behaviour and good conduct, it was gradually
realised that this sunna had an added advantage in that it constituted part of
Qur'anic hermeneutics: to know how the Qur'an was relevant to a particular
case, and how it was to be interpreted, Prophetic verbal and practical discourse,
often emulated by the Companions, was needed. And they were pedagogical
because, in order to maintain a record of what the Prophet said or did, approved
or disapproved, certain sources had to be mined; this information, once col
lected, needed in turn to be imparted to others as part of the age old oral
tradition of the Arabs, now imbued with a heavy religious element.

The Muslim leadership, caliphs included, was acting within a social fabric
inherited from tribal Arab society in which forging social consensus before

Islamic law

reaching decisions or taking actions was a normative practice. This is one of
the most significant facts about the early Muslim polity and society. In the

spirit of this social consensus, people sought to conform to the group and to
avoid deviating from its will or normative ways, as embodied in a cumulative
history of past action and specific manners of conduct. What their fathers had
done or said was as important as, if not more important than, what their living
peers might say or do. When an important decision was to be taken, a
precedent a surma was nearly always sought. The caliph, with all his
authority and might, first boked for precedent. What he was looking for was
nothing short of a relevant surma that represented the established way of
dealing with any problem at hand. It should not then be surprising that the
Prophet's own practice was largely rooted in certain practices, mostly those
deemed to have fallen within the province ofsunan. 15

Apart from this repertoire of sunan and the superior Qur'an, the qadis and
caliphs also heavily relied on considered opinion (ra'y), which was, during the
entire first Islamic century and part of the next, a major source of legal
reasoning and thus of judicial rulings. While some cases of ra'y involved
personal opinion and individual discretion, this legal source overlapped with
the concept of sunan. In a case occurring around 65/684, for instance, a judge
was asked about the value of criminal damages for causing the loss of any of
the hand's five fingers, and in particular whether or not they are of equal
value. He replied: 'I have not heard from any one of the people of ra'y that any
of the fingers is better than the other.' 1 Here, 'the people of ra'y' are persons
whose judgement and wisdom is to be trusted and, more importantly,
emulated. Ra'y, or considered opinion, comes very close to the notion of
sunna, from which ra'y cannot in fact be separated.

From the very beginning ra'y stood as the technical and terminological
counterpart of Hhn, which referred to matters whose setdement could be
based on established norms that one could invoke from the past. 'Ihn, in other
words, reflected knowledge of past experience what we might call an
authority statement. Ra'y, on the other hand, required the application of
new norms or procedures, with or without reference to past experience
or model behaviour. While both might apply to social, personal, legal and

15 A well studied example is that of 'surplus of property'. The Prophet is said to have spent
the surplus of his personal revenue on the acquisition of equipment for warlike projects,
whereas the pre Islamic Arabs used to spend theirs on charitable and social purposes.
'Umar I adopted this practice as a Prophetic sunna. See M. M. Bravmann, The spiritual
background of early Islam (Leiden, 1972), pp. 129, 175 7, 229ff.

16 M. ibn Khalaf WakT', Akhbar al qudat, 3 vols. (Beirut, n.d.), vol. I, p. 299.

153

The New Cambridge History of Islam

quasi legal matters, they remained distinct from each other. Yet, with the gradual metamorphosis of the content of historical, secular experience into a
Prophetic and religious narrative, authority statements became gradually less
secular, acquiring an increasingly religious meaning. This metamorphosis is
evidenced in the absorption of pre Islamic customary and other practices into
caliphal and Prophetic sunan: the latter would emerge more than two cen turies later as the exclusive body of authority statements.

Yet, inasmuch as ra'y was at times dependent on Him, so was ijtihad, a concept akin to ra'y. Ijtihad, from the very beginning, signified an intellectual
quality supplementing Him, namely, the knowledge of traditional practice and
the ability to deduce from it, through ra'y, a solution. 17 It is no coincidence
therefore that the combination ijtihad al ra'y was of frequent use, signalling

the exertion of ra'y on the basis of Hhn, or knowledge of the authoritative past.

Technically, Him, ra'y and ijtihad were interconnected and at times over lapping. So were the concepts of ra'y and derivatives of ijmcC (consensus), a
concept that was to acquire central importance in later legal thought. The
notion of consensus met ra'y when the latter emanated from a group or from a
collective tribal agreement. The consensual opinion of a group (ijtama'a ra'yuhum c ala ...) not only provided an authoritative basis for action, but also for the creation of surma. A new surma might thus be introduced by a
caliph on the basis of a unanimous resolution formed by a (usually influential)
group of people. Other forms of consensus might reflect the common, unanimous practice of a community, originally of a tribe and later of a garrison
town or a city.

If there was a consensus to be reckoned with, it was that of learned men who
populated the Muslim cities and what once began as garrison towns. These men,
flourishing between 80 and 120 AH (c. 700 and 740 CE), were private individuals
whose motive for engaging in the study of law was largely a matter of piety.
While it is true that a number of these did serve as qadls, their study of the law
was not necessarily associated with this office or with the benefits or patronage
accruing therefrom. Instead, they were driven above all by a profoundly reli
gious commitment to study, and this, among other things, meant the articulation
of a law that would in time come to deal with all aspects of social reality.

Intense personal study of religious narratives was largely a private endeav
our, but it overlapped and mutually complemented the scholarly activity in
the specialised circles of learning (halqas), usually held in the mosques. Some
halqas were exclusively concerned with Qur'anic interpretation, while others

17 Ibid., vol. I, pp. 186 8.

Islamic law

were occupied with Prophetic narrative (to emerge later as Prophetic surma).
A number of halqas, however, were of an exclusively juristic nature, led by and
attracting the most distinguished legal specialists in the lands of Islam. The
scholars of the legal circles were acknowledged as having excelled in law, but
not yet in jurisprudence as a theoretical study a discipline that was to develop much later. Some of them possessed a special mastery of Qur'anic
law, especially inheritance, while others were known for their outstanding
competence in ritual law or in sunan.

The activities of the legal specialists initiated what was to become a funda
mental feature of Islamic law: that legal knowledge as an epistemic quality was to
be the final arbiter in law making. They made of piety a field of knowledge, for
piety dictated behaviour in keeping with the Qur'an and the good example of
the predecessors' sunan. Considered opinion was part of this piety, since it more
often than not took into consideration the Qur] an and the exemplary models
that came so highly recommended. Yet adherence to these legal sources was not
a conscious methodological act: the Qur'an, the sunan and ra'y had so thor
oughly permeated the ethos according to which judges operated and legally
minded scholars lived that they had become paradigmatic.

Those who made it their concern to study, articulate and impart legal knowl
edge acquired both a special social status and a position of privileged epistemic
authority. Whether Arab or non Arab, rich or poor, white or black scholars
emerged as distinguished leaders, men of integrity and rectitude by virtue of
their knowledge, and their knowledge alone. This epistemic authority became a
defining feature of Islamic law, rightly giving it the modern epithet jurists' law'.

The emergence of legal specialists was one development that got under
way once Muslims began engaging in religious discussions, story telling and
instruction in mosques. Another, concomitant, development was the gradual
specialisation of the qadi's office, a specialisation dictated by the fact that the
Arab conquerors' expansion and settlement in the new territories brought
with it an unprecedented volume of litigation, including legally complex cases
usually associated with sedentary styles of life. By the end of the first/seventh
century, and the beginning of the next, judges were relieved of certain non
legal functions, such as policing. At the same time, their legal knowledge was
enhanced by the contributions of the legal specialists, some of whom were
themselves judges. These specialists, moreover, began to be seen as essential
to the courtroom, whence an early doctrine began to surface: a judge must
consult the legal specialists, the fuqaha\ especially if he is not one of them.

Another development, which had started during the 6os/68os and contin
ued long thereafter, was the emergence of Prophetic authority as a legal

155

source independent of other narratives and model practices. The logic of the
Prophet's centricity emerged soon after his death, but its most obvious
manifestation occurred during the second half of the second century (770
810 CE) and thereafter, when his authority became exclusive. The central
phenomenon associated with this process was, however, the proliferation of
formal hadith which came to compete with the practice based, local sunan
what we call here sunnaic practice. The competition was thus between a
formal and nearly universal conception of the Prophetic model and those local
practices that had their own view of the nature of Prophetic surma. With the
emergence of a mobile class of traditionists, whose main occupation was the
collection and reproduction of Prophetic narrative, the formal, literary trans
mission of hadith quickly gained the upper hand over sunnaic practice. The
traditionists were not necessarily jurists or judges, and their impulse was
derived more from religious ethic than from the demands and realities of
legal practice; nevertheless, at the end of the day, their hadith project proved
victorious, leaving behind as distant second the local conceptions of Prophetic
surma a surma that did not have the overwhelmingly personal connection to
the Prophet claimed by the traditionist version. That many local jurists
participated in the traditionist project to the detriment of their own sunnaic
practice is eloquent testimony to the power of the newly emerging hadith.

During the first two centuries AH (seventh eighth CE) the concept of
sunnaic practice could hardly be distinguished from consensus, since the
sanctioning authority of the former resided in the overwhelming agreement
of the legal specialists who collectively upheld this practice. As an expression
of sunnaic practice, consensus was seen as binding and determinative of
hadith. It was not conceived merely as 'the agreement of recognised jurists

during a particular age', a definition that became standard in later legal theory.
Rather, consensus during this early period strongly implied the agreement of
scholars based on continuous practice which was, in turn, based on the consensus of the Companions. It should be stressed here that the latter was
viewed as essential to the process of foregrounding later doctrine in Prophetic
authority, since the consensus of the Companions, ipso facto, was an attestation
of Prophetic practice and intent. The Companions, after all, could not have
unanimously approved a matter that the Prophet had rejected or prohibited.
Nor, in the conception of early jurists, could they have pronounced impermis
sible what the Prophet had declared lawful.

From the very beginning until the end of the second/ eighth century (and for decades thereafter) the legists employed ra'y in their reasoning. Whether
based on knowledge of sunnaic practice or not, ra'y encompassed a variety of

156

Islamic law

inferential methods that ranged from discretionary and loose reasoning to
arguments of a strictly logical type, such as analogy or the argumentum a fortiori. In a gradual process of terminological change that began around the
middle of the second/ eighth century, ra'y appears to have been broken down
into three categories of argument, all of which had originally been offshoots of
the core notion. The most general of these categories was ijtihad, which term,

during the first/ seventh and most of the second/ eighth century, appeared
frequently in conjunction with ra'y, namely, as ijtihad al ra'y, which meant the
exertion of mental energy for the sake of arriving, through reasoning, at a
considered opinion. Later, when the term ra'y was dropped from the combi
nation, ijtihad came to stand alone for this same meaning, but this termino
logical transformation was short lived.

The second category of arguments to emerge out of ra'y was qiyas, signifying
disciplined and systematic reasoning on the basis of the revealed texts, the Qur'an
and hadith. In addition to analogy, its archetypal form, qiyas encompassed the a
fortiori argument in both of its forms the a maiore ad minus and the a minore ad
mains as well as syllogistic, relational and reductio ad absurdum arguments. 1

Yet another argument under the heading of ra'y was istihsan, commonly
translated as juristic preference'. We have no adequate definition of this
reasoning method from the period before al Shaft 1 !, most of our knowledge
of it being derived either from al ShafiTs polemics against it (hardly trust
worthy) or late Hanafi theoretical reconstructions of it (which involved an
ideological remapping of legal history). It seems, however, safe to characterise
the second/ eighth century meaning of istihsan as a mode of reasoning that
yields reasonable results unlike strictly logical inference such as qiyas, which
may lead to undue hardships or impractical solutions. But it was also
employed as a method of achieving equity, driven by reasonableness, fairness
and commonsense. Yet, like ra'y, which acquired a negative connotation
because it included personal opinions that lacked formal grounding in the
revealed texts, istihsan too was rejected. Unlike ra'y, however, it survived in
the later Hanafi and Hanbali schools as a secondary method of reasoning,
though not without ingenious ways of theoretical rehabilitation. 19

18 Malik ibn Anas, al Muwatta 1 (Beirut, 1414/1993), pp. 737 9. For a
more detailed discus

sion on how these arguments developed in later legal theory see Wael B. Hallaq, A
history of Islamic legal theories: An introduction to Sunni usul al fiqh (Cambridge, 1997),
pp. 96 9.

19 Hallaq, History, pp. 107 13. See also G. Makdisi, 'Ibn Taymiya's autograph manuscript on
istihsan: Materials for the study of Islamic legal thought', in G. Makdisi (ed.), Arabic and
Islamic studies in honor ofH. A. R. Gibb (Cambridge, MA, 1965).

One jurist whose writings exemplify the transition from what we may call the pre hadith to the hadith period was al Shafi'i, a champion of Prophetic
hadith as an exclusive substitute for sunnaic practice. His writings manifest a
stage of development in which ra'y meets with the first major attack in an offensive that ultimately led to its ouster (terminologically and to a certain
extent substantively) from Islamic jurisprudence. Categorically labelling ra'y
as arbitrary, he excluded it, along with istihsan, from the domain of reasoning
altogether. Hadith, on the other hand, reflected, for him, divine authority, leaving no room for human judgement except as a method of inference, which
he interchangeably called qiyas /ijtihad.

Al Shafi'i appears to have been the first jurist consciously to articulate the
theoretical notion that Islamic revelation provides a full and comprehensive
evaluation of human acts. The admittance of qiyas {ijtihad) into his jurispru
dence was due to his recognition of the fact that divine intent is not completely

fulfilled by the revealed texts themselves, since these latter do not afford a
direct answer to every eventuality. But to al Shafri, acknowledging the permissibility of qiyas does not bestow on it a status independent of revelation.
If anything, without revelation's sanction of the use of this method it would
not have been allowed, and when it is permitted to operate it is because qiyas is
the only method that can bring out the meaning and intention of revelation
regarding a particular eventuality. Qiyas does not itself generate rules or legal
norms; it merely discovers them from, or brings them out of, the language of
revealed texts. This theory was to become the basis of all later legal theories,
elaborated under the rubric of usul alfiqh.

Judiciary

These developments in legal thought were accompanied by other emerging
institutions in the law, notably, the qadx and his court. By the close of the
second century (c. 800 815 CE) the structure and make up of the court had
taken final shape. All the basic personnel and logistical features had been
introduced by this point, so that any enlargement or diminution of these
elements were merely a function of the nature and needs of the qadi's
jurisdiction. Thus, for example, a qadx might have had one, two or more
scribes, depending on the size of his court and the demands placed on it, but
the scribe's function itself was by then integral to the proceedings, whatever
their magnitude. The same went for all other court officials and functions.

The court's personnel consisted of a judge and any number of assistants
(fl'wan) who performed a variety of tasks. One of these was the court

158

Islamic law

chamberlain (jilwaz), whose function it was to maintain order in the court,
including supervising the queue of litigants and calling upon various persons
to appear before the judge. Some courts whose jurisdiction included regions
inhabited by various ethnic and linguistic groups were also staffed by an
interpreter or a dragoman. Furthermore, witness examiners appear as a
fully established fixture of the court. They were appointed by qadis to enquire
into the rectitude of witnesses who either testified to the claims of litigants or
attested to the legal records, contracts and all sorts of transactions passing
through the court. The court's prestige and authority were also enhanced by
the presence in it of men learned in the law. These, we have seen, were the
legal specialists who, mostly out of piety, made the study and understanding
(lit. fiqh) of religious law their primary private concern, and it was this
knowledge that lent them what I have elsewhere called epistemic authority. 20
The sources are frequently unclear as to whether or not these specialists were
always physically present in the court, but we know that from the beginning
of the second century (c. 720 CE) judges were encouraged to seek the counsel
of these learned men and that, by the 120S/740S, they often did. 21 It is fairly
certain that the legal specialists were regularly consulted on difficult cases and
points of law, although evidence of their permanent physical presence in the
court is meagre.

The practice of consulting trained jurists was therefore normative, although
it was not required by any official political authority. At least this was the case
in the east. In Andalusia, on the other hand, soliciting the opinions of legal
specialists properly called the mushawars was mandatory. There it became

something of a formal matter, insisted upon by both the legal profession and
the political sovereign. Thus, generally speaking, an Andalusian judge's deci
sion was considered invalid without the prior approval of the mushawars.

The courts also included a number of other assistants, including those
whose function it was to search out and apprehend persons charged with a
felony or to bring in defendants against whom a plaintiff had presented the
court with a claim. They were also sent out by the judge to look for witnesses
who might have seen, for example, an illegal act being committed. Some of
these assistants specialised in 'public calling', thus acquiring the technical title
munadis. These munadis usually appeared in markets and public spaces and
spoke out loud on court related matters. They 'called' on certain individuals,
sought either as witnesses or as defendants, to appear before the judge.

20 Hallaq, Authority, pp. ix, 166 235.
21 WakT, Akhbar, vol. II, p. 423, vol. Ill, p. 86.

159

The New Cambridge History of Islam

Occasionally they were used as a means of communicating the judge's
messages to the public.

The judge's assistants also included a number of umana' al hukm (lit. trust
ees of the court) whose tasks involved the safekeeping of confidential infor
mation, property and even cash. One category of these officials was

responsible for the court's treasury, known as the tabut al qudat (the judge's security chest). Its location was in the state treasury but the key to it usually remained with the judge and /or his trustee placed in charge of it. We know that all sorts of monies were kept in it, especially those belonging to heirless deceased persons, to orphans and to absentees. 22

Another trustee, the qassam, was responsible for dividing cash and property among heirs or disputed objects among litigants. This official was usually hired for his technical skills and knowledge of arithmetic. Last, but by no means least, a major official of the court was the judge's scribe, who usually sat immediately to the right or left of the judge, recorded the statements, rebuttals and deposi tions of the litigants and, moreover, drew up legal documents on the basis of court records for those who needed the attestation of the judge to one matter or another. His appointment to the court appears to have been the first to be made when a new judge assumed office, and he was required to be of just character, to know the law and to be skilled in the art of writing. 23

The scribe's function was closely linked with the rise of the institution of the diwan, which represented the totality of the records (sijillat) written by the scribe, kept by the judge and normally filed in a bookcase termed a qimatr. 24 The diwan usually contained records of actions and claims made by two parties in the presence of the judge, who usually signed them before witnesses in order for them to be complete and confirmed. It also contained: (a) copies of contracts, pledges, acknowledgements, gifts, donations and written obliga tions as well as other written instruments; (b) a list of court witnesses; (c) a register of trustees over waqf properties, orphans' affairs and divorcees' alimonies; (d) a register of bequests; 25 ' 2 (e) copies of letters sent to, and

22 M. ibn Yusuf al Kindi, Akhhar qudat Misr, ed. R. Guest (Cairo, n.d.), p. 405.

23 Wael B. Hallaq, 'The qadl's diwan (sijitt) before the Ottomans', BSOAS, 61, 3 (1998),
P- 423.

24 WakT, Akhbar, vol. II, p. 159. Taq! al Din ibn al Najjar, Muntaha al iradat, ed. 'Abd al
Mughnl 'Abd al Khaliq, 2 vols. (Cairo, 1381/ 1962), vol. II, p. 582.

25 Kindi, Akhbar, p. 379; Ahmad ibn 'All al Qalqashandi, Subh al a'shd fi sina'at al insha',
14 vols. (Beirut, 1987), vol. X, p. 284.

26 Waki', Akhbar, vol. II, p. 136; Kindi, Akhbar, pp. 319, 379; Ibn Maza al Husam al Shahid,
Shark adab al qadl HI Khassaf (Beirut, 1994), pp. 57 62; on written obligations see Michael
Thung, 'Written obligations from the 2nd/8th to the 4th century', ILS, 3, 1 (1996).

160

Islamic law

received from, other judges, including any relevant legal documents attached
to such letters; 27 and (f) several other types of registers, such as a record of
prisoners' names and the terms of their imprisonment, a list of guarantors and
a list of legally empowered agents, including the terms of each agency and the
lawsuits involved. 2

The diwan was acknowledged to be the backbone of legal transactions and

the means by which the judge could review his decisions as well as all cases and transactions passing through his court. It was also essential for reviewing the work of earlier judges, especially that of the immediate predecessor. Such a review was usually prompted either by complaints against the outgoing judge or by reasonable suspicion on the part of the new judge of abuse, corruption or one form or another of miscarriage of justice that might be associated with his predecessor. It was access to the diwans that allowed judicial review in Islam to take on a meaningful role a role that was, to some limited extent, equivalent to the practice of appeal in Western judicial systems.

By the beginning of the third/ninth century the judge's functions were defined once and for all, and litigation in all its aspects became his main concern. For in addition to arbitrating disputes, deciding cases and executing verdicts, 29 he supervised the performance of all his assistants the scribe, the witness examiner, the chamberlain, the trustees and the rn.una.Ai. His functions, however, did not exclude other normative duties performed by qadis in earlier periods. Thus, directly or indirectly, he: (i) supervised charitable trusts (awqaf), their material condition, their maintenance and the performance of those who managed them; 30 (2) acted as guardian for orphans, administering their financial affairs and caring for their general well being; 31 (3) took care of the property of absentees, as well as that of anyone who died heirless; 32

(4) heard petitions for conversion from other religions to Islam, and signed witnessed documents to this effect for the benefit of the new Muslims; 33

(5) attended to public works; and (6) often led Friday prayers and prayers at funerals, and announced the appearance of the new moon, signalling the end of the fast of Ramadan.

27 Kindi, Akhbar, p. 410; Abu Nasr al Samarqandi, Rusum al qudat, ed. M. Jasim al Hadithi
(Baghdad, 1985), p. 46.

28 Qalqashandi, Subh al a'sha, vol. X, pp. 274, 291 2; Samarqandi, Rusum al qudat, pp. 34,
39ft; Hallaq, 'Qadi's dlwan', pp. 421, 428 9.

29 Waki', Akhbar, vol. II, p. 415, vol. Ill, pp. 89, 135.

30 Kindi, Akhbar, pp. 383, 424, 444, 450.

31 Waki', Akhbar, vol. II, p. 58; Kindi, Akhbar, p. 444.

32 Waki', Akhbar, vol. II, p. 58; Kindi, Akhbar, p. 444.

33 Waki*, Akhbar, vol. II, p. 65.

Some time after the middle of the second/ eighth century there appeared a
new set of tribunals that stood at the margins of the shaft a courts. These were
the mazalim (lit. 'boards of grievances'), generally instated by governors and
viziers, theoretically on behalf of the caliph, and presumably for the purpose
of correcting wrongs committed by state officials. Theoretically, too, they
were sanctioned by the powers assigned to the ruler to establish justice and
equity according to the religious law (siyasa sharHyya). In reality, however,
they at times represented his absolutist governance and interference in the
shari'a, however marginal this may have been given that the jurisdiction of
these tribunals was both limited and sporadic.

These tribunals tended to apply a wide range of procedural laws wider, at
any rate, than those procedures adopted by the shari'a court judges. They
seem to have adopted a far less stringent procedure admitting, for instance,
coercion and summary judgments. Their penalties, furthermore, exceeded
the prescribed laws of the shaft a. They thus applied penal sanctions in civil
cases, or combined civil and criminal punishments in one and the same case.
Yet the mazalim tribunals functioned less as an encroachment on the shari'a
courts than as a supplement to their jurisdiction. Characterised as courts of
equity, where the sovereign showed himself to be conducting justice, the
mazalim tribunals operated within four main spheres: (i) they prosecuted
injustices committed in the performance of public services, such as unfair or
oppressive collection of taxes, or non payment of salaries by government
agencies; (2) they dealt with claims against government employees who
transgressed the boundaries of their duties and who committed wrongs
against the public, such as unlawful appropriation of private property; (3)
they heard complaints against shari'a judges that dealt mainly with questions
of conduct, including abuses of office and corruption (the mazalim tribunals
did not arrogate to themselves the power to hear appeals against shari'a court
decisions, which as we have seen were to all intents and purposes final);
34 and
(4) they enforced shari'a court decisions that the qadi was unable to
carry out.

The schools

By the beginning of the third /ninth century the shari'a courts and a corpus of
positive law had fully developed. Legal theory and the doctrinal legal schools,
however, were to emerge much later, reaching their apex in the middle of the

34 For a discussion of successor review see D. Powers, 'On judicial review in Islamic law',
Law and Society Review, 26 (1992).

Islamic law

fourth/tenth century. Considerations of space preclude a discussion of legal
theory, 35 but permit brief remarks about the schools and their formation.

We saw that the early interest in law and legal studies evolved in the
environment of the scholarly circles, where men learned in the Qur'an, the
sunna and the general principles of Islam began discussions, among other
things, of quasi legal and often strictly legal issues. By the early part of the
second century (c. 720 40 CE) such learned men had already assumed the role
of teachers whose circles often encompassed students interested specifically in
fiqh, the discipline of substantive law. However, by that time no obvious
methodology of law and legal reasoning had yet evolved, and one teacher's
lecture could not always be distinguished, methodologically, from another's.
Even the body of legal doctrine they taught was not yet complete, as can be
attested from each teacher's particular interests, which were often limited to a
narrow section of legal doctrine (e.g. inheritance, ritual).

By the middle of the second/ eighth century not only had law become more
comprehensive in coverage (though still not as comprehensive as it would
become half a century later), but also the jurists had begun to develop their
own legal assumptions and methodology. Teaching and debates within schol

arly circles must have sharpened methodological awareness, which in turn led
jurists to defend their own, individual conceptions of the law. On adopting a
particular method, each jurist gathered around him a certain following who
learned their jurisprudence and method from him. Yet it was rare that a
student or a young jurist would restrict himself to one circle or one teacher; in
fact, it was not uncommon for aspiring jurists to attend more than one circle in
the same city, and even perhaps several circles, each headed by a different
professor. During the second half of the century aspiringjurists not only made
the round of the circles within one city, but travelled from one region to
another in search of distinguished teachers.

Prominent teachers attracted students who 'took fiqh' from them. A judge
who had studied law under a teacher was likely to apply that teacher's doctrine
in his court although, again, loyalty was not exclusive to a single doctrine. And
if a student acquired a reputation as a qualified jurist, he might 'sit' (jalasa) as a
professor in his own turn, transmitting to his students the legal knowledge he
had gained from his teachers, but seldom without his own reconstruction of this

35 On the post Shafi'I emergence of legal theory see Wael B. Hallaq, 'Was al Shafi'i the
master architect of Islamic jurisprudence?', IJMES, 25 (1993). For a sketch of legal theory
as it had stood around the middle of the fourth/tenth century see Hallaq, Origins,
pp. 122 49. For later formulations of this theory see B. Weiss, The search for God's law
(Salt Lake City, 1992); Hallaq, History.

163

knowledge. The legal doctrine that Abu Hanifa taught to his students was
largely a transmission from his own teachers, notably Hammad (d.
120/737).
The same is true of Malik, al Awza'I, al Shafi'i and many others. None of
these,
however, despite the fact that they were held up as school founders,
constructed
their own doctrine in its entirety. Rather, all of them were as much
indebted to
their teachers as these latter had been indebted to their own. In sum, by
the
middle of the third/ninth century numerous jurists had established
themselves
as leaders in their field and acquired personal followings through the
scholarly
circles in which they debated legal issues, taught jurisprudence to
students and
issued/atwas (responsa).

The absence of loyalty to the doctrines of leading jurists thus meant that
no
normative personal schools had yet existed. Where the latter existed,
they did
so in a narrow sense. Only when a leading jurist attracted a loyal
following of
jurists who exclusively applied his doctrine in courts of law or taught it to
students, or issued fatwas in accordance with it, can we say that a
personal
school of his existed. This was indeed the case with a number of
prominent
jurists, including Abu Hanifa, Ibn Abi Layla, Abu Yusuf, al Shaybarii,
Malik, al
Awza'I, al Thawri and al Shafi'i. All these had loyal followers, but they
also had
many more students who did not adhere exclusively to their respective
doctrines.

Yet even when such personal schools had loyal followers, they did not
truly
represent what Islamic law knew as 'the madhhab', the doctrinal school,
which
possessed several characteristics lacking in the personal schools. First,
the

personal school, when fulfilling the condition of exclusive loyalty, comprised
the positive legal doctrine of a single leadingjurist and, at times, his doctrine as
transmitted by one of his students. The doctrinal school, on the other hand,
possessed a cumulative doctrine of substantive law in which the legal opinions
of the leading jurist, now the supposed 'founder' of the school, were at best,
primi inter pares, and at least equal to the rest of the opinions and doctrines held
by various other jurists, also considered leaders within the school. In other
words, the doctrinal school was a collective, authoritative entity, whereas the
personal school remained limited to the individual doctrine of a single jurist.

Second, the doctrinal school was as much a methodological entity as a
substantive, doctrinal one. In other words, what distinguished a particular
doctrinal school from another was largely its legal methodology and the
positive principles it adopted as a composite school in dealing with its
own law. Methodological awareness on this level was not yet a feature of the
personal schools, although it was on the increase from the middle of the
second /eighth century.

164

Islamic law

Third, a doctrinal school was defined by its substantive boundaries, namely,
by a certain body of legal doctrine and methodological principles that clearly
identified the outer limits of the school as a collective entity. The personal
schools, on the other hand, had no such well defined boundaries, and depar

tore from these boundaries in favour of other legal doctrines and principles
was a common practice.

Fourth, and issuing from the third, was loyalty; for departure from its
substantive law and methodological principles amounted to abandoning the
school, a major event in the life (and biography) of a jurist. For whereas in the
personal schools doctrinal loyalty was almost unknown, in the later doctrinal
schools it was a defining feature of both the school itself and the careers of its
members.

A central feature of the doctrinal school in fact a fifth characteristic
distinguishing it from the personal school was the creation of an axis of
authority around which an entire methodology of law was constructed. This
axis was the figure of what came to be known as the founder, the leading
jurist, in whose name the cumulative, collective principles of the school were
propounded. Of all the leaders of the personal schools and they were many
only four were raised to the level of 'founder' of a doctrinal school: Abu
Hanifa, Malik, al Shafi'i and Ibn Hanbal, to list them in chronological order.
The rest, perhaps with the possible exception of the Zahirite school, did not
advance to this stage, with the result that they, as personal schools, were of
relatively short duration.

The so called founder, the eponym of the school, thus became the axis of
authority construction: as bearer of this authority he was called the imam, and
characterised as the absolute mujtahid who presumably forged for the school
its methodology on the basis of which the positive legal principles and
substantive law were constructed. The legal knowledge of the absolute
mujtahid was presumed to be all encompassing and thus wholly creative.
The school was named after him, and he was purported to have been its
originator. His knowledge included mastery of legal theory (usul alfiqh),
Qur'anic exegesis, hadith and its criticism, legal language, the theory of
abrogation, substantive law, arithmetic and the all important science of juristic
disagreement.

All these disciplines were necessary for the imam because he was thought
to be the only one in the school who could engage directly with the revealed
texts from which, presumably, he derived the foundational structure of the
school's substantive law. The imam's doctrine therefore constituted the only
purely juristic manifestation of the legal potentiality of revealed language.

165

The New Cambridge History of Islam

Without it, in other words, revelation would have remained just that, reve
lation, lacking any articulation as law.

The madhhab, therefore, was mainly a body of authoritative legal doctrine
existing alongside individual jurists who participated in the elaboration of, or
adhered to, that doctrine in accordance with an established methodology
attributed exclusively to the eponym. The latter thus became, in this system,
the absolute and independent mujtahid, while all subsequent mujtahids and
jurists, however great their contributions, remained attached by their loyalty
to the tradition of the madhhab that was symbolised by the figure of the
founder. What made a madhhab (as a doctrinal school) a madhhab was there
fore this feature of authoritative doctrine whose ultimate font is presumed to
have been the absolute mujtahid founder, not the mere congregation of jurists
around the name of a titular eponym. This congregation would have been
meaningless without the polarising presence of an authoritative, substantive
and methodological doctrine constructed in the name of a founder, who was

regarded as an axis of authority.

Devolving as it did upon the individual jurists who were active in the scholarly circles, legal authority never resided in the state, and this too was a prime factor in the rise of the madhhab. Whereas law in other imperial systems and complex civilisations was often 'state' based, in Islam the ruling powers had virtually nothing to do with the production and promulgation of law. Therefore the need arose to anchor law in a system of authority that was not political. Yet the early scholarly circles, which consisted of little more than legal scholars and interested students, lacked the ability to produce a unified legal doctrine that would provide an axis of legal authority. The personal schools managed to afford the first step towards providing such an axis, since the application (in courts and fatwas) and the teaching of a single, unified doctrine that is, the doctrine of the leading jurist around whom a personal school had formed permitted a measure of doctrinal unity. But since the personal schools, though vast in number, were only slightly more effective than the even more numerous scholarly circles, a more significant, polarising axis of authority was still needed.

The second/ eighth century community of jurists fashioned and adminis tered law in the name of the ruling dynasty. This community was juristically speaking largely independent, and possessed the power to serve as the ruler's link to the masses, aiding him in his bid to acquire legitimacy. As long as the ruler benefited from this legitimising agency, the legal community benefited from financial support and at the same time easily acquired inde pendence. Accordingly, rallying around a single juristic doctrine was certainly

166

Islamic law

one way in which a personal school could acquire a mass following and thus
attract political/ financial support. Such support was not limited to direct
financial favours bestowed by the ruling elite, but extended to prestigious
judicial appointments that guaranteed not only handsome pay but also
political and social influence. These considerations alone not to mention
others would be enough to explain the importance of such rallying around
outstanding figures. The construction of the figure of an absolute mujtahid
who represented the culmination of doctrinal developments within the school
was a way to anchor law in a source of authority that constituted an alternative
to the authority of the body politic. Whereas in other cultures the ruling
dynasty promulgated the law, enforced it and constituted the locus of legal
authority, in Islam it was the doctrinal madhhab that produced law and
afforded its axis of authority. This is to say that legal authority resided in the
collective, juristic doctrinal enterprise of the school, not in the body politic or
in the doctrine of a single jurist.

The legists served the rulers as an effective tool for reaching the masses,
from whose ranks they emerged and whose interests they represented. It was
one of the salient features of the pre modern Islamic body politic (as well as
those of Europe and Far Eastern dynasties) that it lacked control over the
infrastructures of the civil populations it ruled. Jurists and judges thus
emerged as the civic leaders who, though themselves products of the masses,
found themselves, by the nature of their profession, involved in the day to day
running of the masses' affairs. The legists were often called upon to express
the will and aspirations of those belonging to the non elite classes. They not
only interceded on their behalf at the higher reaches of power, but also
represented for the masses the ideal of piety, rectitude and fine education.
Their very profession as Guardians of Religion, experts in religious law and
exemplars of a virtuous Muslim lifestyle made them not only the most

genuine representatives of the masses but also the true 'heirs of the Prophet', as a Prophetic hadith came to attest. 36 Therefore the government
fulfilled its dire need for legitimisation through the powerful legal profession.

At the same time, however, the latter clearly depended on royal and govern
ment patronage, the single most important contributor to their financial well being. They were often paid handsome salaries when appointed to the
judgeship, in addition to generous grants received in their capacity as private
scholars. Thus, inasmuch as the legists depended on the financial favours of

36 Abu 'Umar Yusuf ibn 'Abd al Barr, Jami' bayan al 'ilm wafadlihi, 2 vols. (Beirut, n.d.),
vol. I, p. 34.

those holding political power, these latter depended on the legists for realising
their aims. Put differently, the more the political elite complied with the imperatives of the law, the more legitimising support it received from the legists. And the more these latter cooperated with the former, the more material and political support they received. This dialectic of mutual depend
ence between the political and the legal was to dominate the entirety of Islamic history until the dawn of modernity, which ushered in the nation state which appropriated law making and in the process marginalised and
finally obliterated the traditional legal class altogether. 37

Practice and legal change

One of the most remarkable features of Islamic civilisation as a whole, and
of the sharfa in particular, is the successful synthesis it struck between the
ethical, legal and religious principles, on the one hand, and the demands
of worldly reality, on the other. From a legal perspective, the primary locus
of this synthesis was the sharfa court, the default and unrivalled court of
Islamic societies until, that is, Muslims began to react to modernity.
Although much conflict resolution and other transactions occurred on the
periphery and outside of the court, the latter, represented by its single qadi,
formed the axis around which these out of court transactions took place and
conflicts were resolved. The highly informal setting of the court allowed
much strictly non legal negotiation to take place, where social values, family
and tribal connections and social status were brought to bear on the cases at
hand. Emphasis was placed on amicable settlement (sulk), normatively
requested by the qadi before any court proceedings began. The qadi himself
often presided over 'sessions' in which the disputants met, but his function
and capacity as qadi was not exercised. It was his prestige as a judge,
scholar and man of social status that was brought to bear on the dispute,
and it was his skill of forging consensus (essential to any such role) that
permitted a satisfactory solution.

Once amicable settlement failed, the case would normally be introduced to
the court, although in comparison with Western courts of law the
proceedings would remain largely informal and subject to the discretion of
the judge. This is not to say, however, as Max Weber and his followers once

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37 For a detailed discussion of the relationship between law and politics see M. Q. Zaman,
Religion and politics under the early 'Abbasids; The emergence of the proto Sunni elite (Leiden,
1997)-

168

Islamic law

mistakenly thought, that the qddi dispensed primitive 'palm tree justice', 38
since the latter was, at the end of the day, bound by both an articulate system
of procedure and a highly developed corpus of substantive law. But these very
procedures and laws bestowed on him a wide margin of discretion that, in
turn, afforded him and his court the flexibility that is comparatively absent in
the highly formal tribunals of the modern state. This flexibility and informality
was the hallmark of the Islamic court. It manifested itself in the carrying out of
the court's business, from start to finish. Anyone apart from minors and
madmen could 'approach the court' (an expression absent in the language of
sharfa, but indicative of the formal and stratified distance between the
common law magistrate, on the one hand, and the litigating parties and
their council, on the other). Similarly, plaintiffs and defendants, as well as
others, could speak as they knew best (or not). No decorum specific to the
court was maintained, but the qddi and his bailiffs usually encouraged, and
politely demanded, proper and seemly behaviour. It was not uncommon for
some defendants or others to be loud and disorderly (on occasion even
insulting towards the judge), but such situations never required the penalties
involved in the Western concept, where one can be declared 'in contempt of
the court'. The qddi, in other words, was not, in his court, a wielder of
discipline and punishment, representing the coercive powers of the state.
Rather, he engaged with the disputants directly, informally and without
mediation, since lawyers and council were never known in the courts of
Islam. In such an engagement no one was required to conform to a particular
manner of conduct, beyond what is socially acceptable. The qddi heard the

parties, who might have hailed from the ranks of peasants or princes, the illiterate or the learned. In such a setting, much non legal material was presented before the court, but the qddi normatively considered it his duty
to sort out for himself the 'legal facts' relevant to the dispute.

To these legal facts the qddi applied fiqh, the substantive law of the sharTa.
This stage involved the sociological channelling of fiqh, namely, the trans ference of the latter, with all of its worldly potentialities, from the textual world of the professional jurist to the world of social practice. The court, then,
constituted the juncture where theory met practice, where the formal legal
conception was reduced to a positivist fit within a concrete perhaps unique
social reality dominated by the localised imperatives of the moral community.

38 D. Powers, 'Kadijustiz or qadl justice? A paternity dispute from fourteenth century
Morocco', ILS, 1, 3 (1994), repr. in D. Powers, Law, society, and culture in the Maghrib,
1300 1500 (Cambridge, 2002).

By the point when it was applied in the qadi's court, fiqh would have already
undergone a long and complex process. The qadi's reference might have been
the long compendium (mdbsut), but it might just as well have been the abridge
ment (mukhtasar) he studied in the college of law (madrasa), where he acquired
knowledge of it by memorising and understanding the legal text. The mukhtasar

is by necessity adroitly exiguous, dense and often exhibiting an elliptic economy
of words. Often impenetrable, it elicits the commentary of the professor, with
out whose expert intervention the text would remain inaccessible to the
student. Something of a medium size or a thin volume, the mukhtasar represents
a condensation of the^iqh corpus as expounded in the shuruh or mabsutat multi
voluminous works of exquisite but enormous detail.

Defying the human capacity to retain information by rote, the shuruh and
mabsutat were abridged in a manner that allowed the student to recall
mentally through citing from the mukhtasar a clause or a sentence a
principle plus a host of cases and examples illustrating the law applicable to
a particular case. The student's memorisation of the abridgement was integral
to the process of commentary received from the professor in the study circle
(halqa). The oral commentary in the halqa reflected the contents of the shuruh
and the mabsutat, but did not necessarily duplicate them. Examples of a
casuistic nature were constantly introduced to illustrate positive legal princi
pies, but the source of these examples might have been either a long text or
the professor's own legal practice. For it was quite common, if not the norm,
that a professor of law was also a mufti or a judge, and when he engaged in the
role of a teacher he would bring his experience as mufti and judge to the halqa,
where it would be brought to bear upon his students' course of study. Also
common was the scholarly companionship (suhba) between student and
teacher: a student might sit in a judge's court as an apprentice or as a witness
or scribe, and when the qadi finished his hearings, he might well open the halqa
for ifta' or teaching, and the same student/apprentice/witness/scribe will
continue his learning in the transformed halqa.

From the early fourth/ tenth century every school adopted a mukhtasar, not
only as a standard pedagogical text, but also as an authoritative summary of its
substantive and procedural law. 39 The utility of these mukhtasars could at

times last up to a century or two before needing to be replaced by another
abridgement, but such a substitution never meant that the older mukhtasars
became obsolete. In fact, the process of replacement itself was gradual, slow

39 M. Fadel, 'The social logic oftaqhd and the rise of the mukhtasar', ILS, 3, 2 (1996).

Islamic law

and, strictly speaking, never complete, for while new mukhtasars did become
standard and 'canonical', the old ones, as a rule, never totally faded away.

This continuing relevance of the mukhtasar was typical of all other legal genres, beginning with those basic works written down on the authority of the
founding masters during the second /eighth century and ending with the magisterial compendia of the last great jurists of the thirteenth/nineteenth.
Yet it is a salient feature of Islamic legal history that legal works the basis of
legal practice in the law courts, in ifta' and document drafting (shurut) were
constantly updated, rewritten and modified in a number of ways. No work
was identical to another, and significant differences could indeed be observed
between and among successive works of the same genre and in the same school. For the past century, and until quite recently, Western scholarship
viewed this cumulative textual activity as a hair splitting exercise, where the

piling of commentary upon commentary yielded nothing of substance worth
studying. 40 More recent scholars, however, have come to appreciate the
output of Muslim legal scholarship, and indeed took delight in studying its
rich and varied scholarly texture; yet their verdict remained that the juristic
tradition, with all its massive corpus of texts, commentaries and super
commentaries, represented no more than 'intellectual play', having little, if
anything, to do with their society and its problems. 41 This brand of scholarship
is clearly associated with the academic but predominantly political doctrine
espousing the sharfa's stagnation a doctrine that justifies and rationalises the
latter's eradication as part of the colonising and modernising project. 42 Thus
far there has been no serious research to show that such stagnation ever
existed. In fact, the latest scholarship has demonstrated a diametrically oppos
ing thesis, namely, that Islamic legal discourse constituted the vehicle through
which legal change as a response to changing social reality was modulated.

It must be stressed that legal change during the pre modern period was
characterised by two qualities, the first of which was its imperceptible nature.
No sudden mutability was required, no ruptures, violent or otherwise, but
rather a piecemeal modification of particular aspects of the law, and only
when general and wide ranging circumstances (ma ta'ummu bi hi al balwa)
demanded such modifications. The change, therefore, was always eminently
organic, naturally arising, as it were, from the adaptive experiences of the past

40 See, e.g., N.J. Coulson, A history of Islamic law (Edinburgh, 1964),
esp. at p. 84.

41 See, e.g., N. Calder, 'Law', in S. H. Nasr and O. Leaman (eds.), History of Islamic
philosophy, (London, 1996).

42 Wael B. Hallaq, 'The quest for origins or doctrine? Islamic legal studies as colonialist
discourse', UCLA Journal of Islamic and Near Eastern Law, 2, 1 (2002 3).

The New Cambridge History of Islam

and, most importantly, from within the legal subculture of a particular region.
(After the third/ninth century the main regions that developed legal subcul
tures were Transoxania, Iran, Iraq, Syria, Egypt, western North Africa and
Andalusia. By that time the Hijaz and the Yemen had become legally mar
ginal.) The second quality lay in the fact that a modern notion of change
(which tends to signify qualitative leaps and at times epistemically violent
ruptures from the past) was clearly absent from the conceptual world and
discourse of the jurists. The famous dictum that 'the fatwa changes with the
changing of times and places' certainly did not mirror the presence in tradi
tional Islamic law of this modern notion of change, but instead stated a
working principle of accommodation and malleability. Change, however it
was understood, was both evolutionary and organic.

How, then, did the juristic works reflect and serve as a vehicle of impercep
tible and piecemeal change? During the late first/seventh and second/eighth
centuries legal issues arising from the discussions and debates of the legal
specialists (all of which issues were integral to the emerging Muslim com
munities) found their way into the legal treatises written on the authority of
Abu Hariifa, Abu Yusuf, al Shaybani and al Shafi'I, among others. This mode of
'textualising' socio legal experiences and discourses continued to operate for

many centuries but, with the crystallisation of law and legal institutions, this
process of textualisation was effected through well defined channels and
mechanisms. By far the most important of these was the fatwa. Although
laypersons addressed the mufti with a wide variety of questions, the legally
significant and thus important fatwas usually originated in the law courts
where, upon finding a case difficult to adjudicate, the judge would solicit a
solution from a mufti. Finding it at times too difficult to answer, the latter
would redirect the question to a higher mufti, one who possessed scholarly
credentials superior to his own. Note that the ultimate authority remained
within the class of muftis, whose counsel to the court, we saw earlier, was
highly recommended (and, in Andalusia, required).

Originating in the world of legal practice, the fatwas (not, notably, court
decisions) were collected and published, particularly those among them that
contained new law or represented new legal elaborations on older problems
that continued to be of recurrent relevance. The collected fatwas usually
underwent a significant editorial process in which irrelevant facts and personal
details (proper names, names of places, dates, immaterial facts etc.) were
omitted. Moreover, they were abridged with a view to abstracting their
contents into strictly legal formulas, usually of the hypothetical type: 'If X
does Y under a set of conditions P, then L (legal norm) follows.'

172

Islamic law

Whether abstracted and edited or not, these fatwa collections became part
of the authoritative legal literature. In Hanafi law, for example, they formed
the third tier of legal doctrine, reflecting the contributions made by jurists who

flourished after the first school masters, Abu Hanifa, Abu Yusuf, al Shaybam

and al Hasan ibn Ziyad. The first and second tiers mainly belonged to the first

three. In sheer size and in the daily reality of legal practice, however, the third

tier was the most dominant, as it reflected the multiple accretions and successive modifications over the 'basic doctrine' of the first masters.

As part of their integration into the authoritative body of legal doctrine, the

faiwas, once abstracted, were incorporated into the work of the author jurist,

the musannif. The latter can be said to have provided the world ofsharfa with

the fully developed and comprehensive accounts of the law, with all of its juristic disagreements (ikhtilaf), dialectical subject matter and authoritative

opinion. The author jurist's activity extended from writing the short risala to

compiling the long work, be it the mabsut (lit. extended) or shark (commen

tary). It was mainly these two types of discourse that afforded the author jurist the framework (and full opportunity) to articulate a modified body of

law, one that reflected both the evolving social conditions and the state of

the art in the law as a technical discipline. His subject matter was multi layered, comprising the fundamental and foundational principles of the law

principles overlaid by the technical contributions of successive generations of

jurists, ranging from the founders' disciples down to his immediate predeces

sors. His main source for elaborating the basic law and foundational principles

was the fatwa literature, which intimately reflected legal practice within the

courts and outside them, as well as the general practical concerns of the community. Each generation of these long works maintained the general principles of positive and procedural law while simultaneously incorporating

all current and relevant subject matter, whether found in older or newer works. Cases that had gone out of circulation were discarded, whereas new

legal opinions dealing with evolving conditions, especially those of relevance

to communal issues (ma ta'ummu hi hi al balwa) were incorporated. 43

These long works, or abridged versions thereof, constituted the jurispruden
tial basis of legal practice and adjudication. Thus the movement was at once
circular and dialectical, one that may aptly be described as a 'dialectical wheel':
society's legal disputes ended up before the courts of law; judges encountered
hard cases which they took to the mufti for an expert opinion (though the mufti
was approached by laypersons too); the mufti provided solutions to these hard

43 Hallaq, Authority, pp. 166 235.

cases, thereby preparing them for integration into the positive law of his school;
students usually copied, collected, edited, abridged and finally 'published' such
fatwas; the author jurist, the author of the school's authoritative fiqh work,
incorporated most of these fatwas into his compendium. This he did while
(i) stricdy maintaining the body of principles governing his school's positive
legal corpus; (2) weeding out opinions that had fallen out of circulation; and,
conversely, (3) retaining opinions that continued to be relevant to legal practice.
The product of this juristic activity was the fiqh work that continued to gauge
and be gauged by legal practice. In sum, while legal practice was guided by fiqh
discourse, the latter was shaped and modified by the former. Dialectically, one
issued from, yet also fed, the other.

Modernity and the eclipse of the sharfa

By every indication the sharfa served Muslim societies well for centuries. However, from the eleventh/seventeenth century onwards India had pro gressively fallen under British rule, Indonesia under Dutch rule and, by the beginning of the thirteenth/nineteenth, Russian armies had subjected the Ottoman empire to crushing defeats that were later exacerbated by onerous debts to Britain. Much the same was also true of Qajar Iran as well as of other Muslim principalities and dynasties.

Under colonialist pressures the sharfa underwent significant changes, so that by the end of the thirteenth/nineteenth century it had been reduced to the area of family law. Some of the first sharfa spheres to disappear were commercial and criminal laws, both replaced by European regulations that were necessary for efficient economic exploitation of the Muslim colonies and of other lands that otherwise came under European influence. Local Muslim governments, aware of their military incompetence, realised the need to update their armies and to build a more centralised rule along lines that Europe had by then already developed. This was the beginning of a modernisation process that required building a state system in the modern image which meant not only central isation, but also a bureaucratic machinery that could subordinate all legal and educational institutions to the imperatives of a homogenising policy. In the Ottoman empire this translated, as a first step, into a central administration of waqfs, for which a special government ministry was established. The waqfs importance stemmed from the fact that they often were rich charitable endow ments that sustained legal education. Under the Ottomans these foundations, whose madrasas produced the qadis running the empire's legal and administra tive systems, were centred in Istanbul. Until 1242/ 1826 the waqfs operated

Islamic law

independently, with each waqf having its finances administered by a private
supervisor. But in that year, and for decades thereafter, waqf income increasingly
went to the public treasury, to be redistributed with diminishing returns back to
the waqfs themselves. While this policy enriched the central treasury, it had the
effect of depleting these waqfs, thereby weakening the professional legal class.

Shari'a's position in the Ottoman empire was further eroded when, after the
middle of the century, new modern, secular schools began to appear, and a
modern school of law was established in 1293/ 1876. Not only were new,
Western inspired codes introduced in lieu of shar?a laws, but a hierarchical
system of secular courts (called Nizamiyya) came to supplement, and then
gradually replace, most religious courts. By the end of the thirteenth/nine
teenth century these latter adjudicated matters of personal status, which
included child custody, paternity, inheritance, gifts and, to a limited
extent, waqf.

The creation of secular schools began to attract the younger generations,
who found in them greater opportunity and the potential for superior pay
than in the increasingly depleted institutions teaching the sharTa. Thus,
'ulama 1 families, often in positions of power, would direct their children to
study in the new schools in preparation for careers in the newly created
secular courts and bureaucracy, since their new educational backgrounds
equipped them to pursue such careers better than others. This professional
transformation signalled the end of a shar7a trained and shar7a minded class
that had until then exercised exclusive control over the law.

The transposition of Islamic law from the fairly independent and non formal terrain of the jurists to that of the highly formalised and centralised
agency of the state found manifestation in the compendium entitled Majallat
al ahkam al 'adliyya. Between 1870 and 1877 (1287 95 AH) the sixteen books
making up the Majalla (containing 1,851 articles in the Turkish language) were
published, all dealing with civil law and procedure (to the exclusion of marriage and divorce). One of the aims of the Majalla was to provide, in the
manner of a code, a clear and systematic statement of the law for the benefit of
both the sharfa and Nizamiyya courts, a statement that was geared to a professional elite that had lost touch with Arabicate juristic hermeneutics.
Yet the source of this codification was the corpus juris of the Hanafi school,
particularly those opinions within it that seemed to its drafters to offer especially in their reconstituted form a modernised version of Islamic law thought to 'suit the present conditions'. 44 The opinions chosen did not

44 S. Onar, 'The Majalla', in M. Khadduri and H.J. Liebesny (eds.), Law in the Middle East
(Washington, 1955), p. 295.

175

The New Cambridge History of Islam

necessarily reflect the authoritative doctrines in the Hanafi school, nor were
they, strictly speaking, all exclusively Hanafi, for some were imported from
the other schools if they had been approved by the later Hanafites. 45

The Majalla was to be implemented in the new Nizamiyya courts, whose

staff were increasingly being trained in nonfiqh law. And since no juristic
opinion was truly binding on any judge without the sovereign's intervention,
the Majalla, after its complete publication, was promulgated as a sultanic code
(a momentous act sanctioning, once and for all, the supreme authority of the
state). But it was soon to have a fierce rival in the 1880 Code of Civil
Procedure, modelled after the French example. Procedure was steadily and
rapidly gaining greater importance towards the close of the century, it being
increasingly seen, in the manner of all modern legal systems, as the backbone
of the law. The highly formalised and complex procedural processes repre
sented a large domain in which the sharfa was almost totally replaced.

It was obvious to the reformers, and even to their opponents, that the
venture of the Majalla was a last ditch effort to salvage the sharfa as a law in
force, in part intended to keep at bay the flood of legal Westernisation. The
systematic substitution of Turkish for Arabic as the language of instruction in
the newly established modern schools was in part a phenomenon integral to
the intentional spreading of nationalist feelings that were harnessed as a tool to
keep the empire from disintegrating into various ethnic groupings. The sharVa
faced the challenge not only of adapting to the rapidly changing economic and
material conditions brought about by modernity, but also to a linguistic de
centring whereby the new institutions and the legal personnel that staffed
them literally communicated in a language that was not the language of the
traditional law. 46

Thus the shar7a's rival was not only the modern state, but the nationalism
that the state had so efficiently harnessed. 47 The Majalla was thus as much an
attempted linguistic (i.e. nationalist) remedy as it was a legal one (although its
production also created another dialectic by which, on the one hand, knowl

edge of the Arabicate tradition so central to the law was weakened, while on the other, the chances of success in closing the gap between any

45 J. N. D. Anderson, 'Law reform in Egypt: 1850 1950', in P. M. Holt (ed.), Political and
social change in modern Egypt (London, 1968), p. 217.

46 On the global movement of using language as a means of constructing nationalism see
the insightful analysis in B. Anderson, Imagined communities: Reflections on the origin and
spread of nationalism, 2nd edn (London and New York, 2006), pp. 67 82.

47 On nationalism as the secularised religion of the state see T. Asad, Formations of the
secular (Stanford, 2003), pp. 187 94.

Majalla like effort and the demands of the economic and political orders were
greatly reduced). Ultimately, however, the Majalla was less about such linguistic nationalist matters than it was about a discreet political assertion
of legal power. It said once and for all that, like the now centralised sharfa
courts themselves, thefiqh from now on was not the province of the jurists but
rather that of the state.

Similar processes of codification occurred in British India. It was not until
the appointment of Warren Hastings as governor of Bengal in 1772 that a serious British legal redesign of India got under way. 48 The appointment
ushered in the so called Hastings Plan, to be implemented first in Bengal. The plan conceived a multi tiered system that required exclusively British

administrators at the top, seconded by a tier of British judges who would consult with local qadis and muftis (mulavis) with regard to issues governed by
Islamic law. On the lowest rung of judicial administration stood the run of the mill Muslim judges who administered law in the civil courts of Bengal,
Madras and Bombay. The plan also rested on the assumption that local customs and norms could be incorporated into a British institutional structure
of justice that was regulated by 'universal' jural ideals.

In order to deal with what was seen by the British as an uncontrollable mass
of individual juristic opinion, the Oxford classicist and foremost orientalist Sir
William Jones (1746 94) proposed to Hastings the creation of codes, or what
he termed a 'complete digest of Hindu and Mussulman law'. 49 The justifica
tion for the creation of such an alien system within Islamic (and Hindu) law
was articulated in a language that problematised this law by casting it as unsystematic, inconsistent and arbitrary. The challenge thus represented itself
in the question of how to understand and legally manage native society in an
economically efficient manner, which in part shaped Jones's ambition of constructing a system that offered 'a complete check on the native interpreters
of the several codes'. 50

It was not long before Hastings commissioned the translation of Marghrnani's Hidaya (a Hanafi classical work) into Persian, a version that
Charles Hamilton in turn used for his own translation (1791) into English. A
year later Jones himself translated al Sirajiyya, this time directly from the

48 W. Menski, Hindu law: Beyond tradition and modernity (Oxford, 2003), pp. 164S.

49 B. Cohn, Colonialism and its forms of knowledge: The British in India (Princeton, 1996),
p. 69.

50 Cited in ibid. See also M. R. Anderson, 'Legal scholarship and the politics of Islam in

British India', in R. S. Khare (ed.), Perspectives on Islamic law, justice, and society (Lanham,
MD, 1999), P- 74-

Arabic. 51 This treatise on inheritance was adopted in translation to compensate
for the silence of the Hidaya on this important branch of the law. 52 The immediate purpose of these translations was to make Islamic law directly accessible to British judges, who deeply mistrusted the native mulavis advising
them on points of law. 53

The choice of the Hidaya was not fortuitous. The text was composed by one
of the most esteemed jurists in the Hanafi school, to which the great majority of
India's Sunni Muslims adhered. To cite it, the British thought, was to reduce the
likelihood of juristic disagreement, the source of the much detested legal plural
ism. Furthermore, it was concise enough to qualify as a code. In fact, it was the
briefest authoritative manual of Hanafi law that could serve in such a manner.
And it is precisely here where the usefulness of this text lay. Its brevity reflected
the authoritative doctrine of the Hanafi school as Marghinani, the distinguished
Transoxanian author jurist, saw it. It did not, however, sum up the general
doctrine of the school, much less its range, especially in South Asia; as all such
authoritative texts do, it stated only what Marghinani considered, in his own age
and region (sixth/ twelfth century Farghana and, more widely, Transoxania), to

be the commonly practised and accepted doctrines of the school (common
acceptance and practice of a doctrine being constitutive of epistemic and juristic
authority). 54 Furthermore, it did not constitute the law, but the interpretive
basis on which the law might be applied in a particular time and place. For in so
far as application of the law was concerned it was the commentary, rather than
the Hidaya itself, that was the practical judicial desideratum. In and by itself it
was therefore far less important than the British appeared to assume, since their
formal use of it qualitatively differed from its nativist, heuristic use as a peg for
commentarial and practice based jurisprudence.

The translation of the Hidaya amounted in effect to its codification, for by
severing it from its Arabicate interpretive and commentarial tradition, it ceased to
function in the way it had done until then. Thus, the 'codification' of the Hidaya
(and through it, of the Islamic law of personal status, broadly speaking) served at

51 William Jones, al Sirajiyah or the Mahomedan law of inheritance (Calcutta, 1861).

52 The Hidaya does deal with bequests, however. See Burhan al Din 'All ibn Abi Bakr
al Marghlnam, al Hidaya: Sharh biddyat al mubtadi, 4 vols. (Cairo, 1980 (repr.)), vol. IV,
pp. 23iff. On omissions from the translated text and on its later uses in colonial
education, see John Strawson, 'Islamic law and English texts', Law and Critique, 6,
1 (i995), PP- 27 8.

53 Anderson, 'Legal scholarship', 74; D. H. Kolff, 'The Indian and the British law
machines: Some remarks on law and society in British India', in W.J. Mommsen
and J. A. De Moor (eds.), European expansion and law: The encounter of European and
indigenous law in i9t)t and 20th century Africa and Asia (Oxford, 1992), pp. 213 14.

54 Hallaq, Authority, pp. 155 64.

Islamic law

least four purposes. First, it accomplished what the British had aimed to do for so
long namely, to curb the judicial 'discretion of the qacB and, more specifically,
the mulavis and muftis who assisted the courts. Thus, by making the text of the
law available to the British judges, these Muslim legists were eliminated as jural
middlemen, leaving the British with the sole power and prerogative to adjudicate
in the name of Islamic law. Second a further step towards totalistic control the
act of translation cum codification represented a replacement of the native
system's interpretive mechanisms by those of English law. Thus the seemingly
innocuous adoption of the translation amounted in effect to what might be
termed a policy of 'demolish and replace'. Third, by casting Arabic Islamic juristic
texts in a fixed form, in English, the law ceased to be related organically to the
Arabicate juristic and hermeneutical tradition of Islam. And fourth, the new legal
texts served to silence customary law, which was not only multifarious but
essential to the functioning of Islamic law. This removal of custom from the
domain of 'official' law was intended, first, to streamline (or homogenise) the
otherwise complex jural forms with which the British had to deal, and second, to
deprive Islamic law of one of its mainstays: the communal and customary laws

that were entwined with the shaft a on the level of application. Thus the very act
of translation uprooted Islamic law from its interpretive juristic soil and at the
same time from the native social matrix in which it was embedded, and on which
its successful operation depended. It is instructive that the same process, this time
of Turkification, occurred in the Ottoman empire towards the end of the
thirteenth/ nineteenth century and thereafter, producing similar results in sever
ing the shaft a from its interpretive tradition.

By the early years of the thirteenth/ nineteenth century the courts of India
had begun to depend heavily on these translations, which not only made less
sense when shorn of their sociological and native hermeneutical contexts, but
were also replete with inaccuracies and plain juristic linguistic errors. This
court practice, so called Anglo Muhammadan law, was the legal system that
the British created, or caused to be created, in their Indian colony. The
designation refers less to the fact that it was the British who determined a
particular application of the law in an Islamic judicial and juristic context, and
much more to the fact that it was a heavily distorted English legal perspective
on Islamic law that was administered to Muslim individuals. It may even be
argued that Anglo Muhammadan law at times involved the forceful applica
tion of English law as Islamic law 55 exemplified only in part by Abul Fata v

55 M. B. Hooker, Legal pluralism: An introduction to colonial and neo colonial laws (Oxford,
1975), P- 96.

179

Russomoy Dhur Chowdhury (1894), wherein the Privy Council deliberately
ignored Ameer Ali's opinion regarding the law ofwaqf, and instead decided
the matter on the basis of the English law of trust. (It was not until two
decades later that this ruling was reversed in the 1913 Mussalman Waqf
Validating Act.) Yet no systematic importation of raw English regulations
was involved in the creation of this hybridity; rather, what was mostly
implicated was the imposition of English jural principles grounded in the
colonisers' highly subjective notions of justice, equity and good conscience'
notions that were bound to alter the shape of Islamic^iqh itself.

Furthermore, the Anglo Muhammadan law was no less affected by the
British perceptions of governance, themselves heavily derived from the
intractable connections between law and the modern state. For instance,
both Governors Hastings and Cornwallis (1786 93) rejected, as did their
British counterparts elsewhere, 56 the entire tenor of the sharfa law of homi
cide (dima') on the grounds that this law granted private, extrajudicial priv
ileges to the victim's next of kin, who were empowered to mete or not mete
out punishment (ranging from retaliation, to payment of blood money, to
pardon) as they saw fit. This right, they held, was the exclusive preserve of the
state, which, by definition, had the 'legitimate' right to exercise violence. 57
Reflecting an entrenched state culture of monopoly over violence, Cornwallis
further argued that too often criminals escaped punishment under the rule of
Islamic law, a situation that would not be allowed to obtain under what he
must have seen as an efficient state discipline. 58 His voice echoed Hastings'
complaint that Islamic law was irregular, lacking in efficacy and 'founded on
the most lenient principles and on an abhorrence of bloodshed'. 59 (Ironically,
these colonial perceptions of Islamic law have been diametrically reversed
during the last three or four decades.)

A salient systemic change effected by the creation of Anglo Muhammadan
law was the rigidification of Islamic law, a symptom of the attempt to remould
Islamic law in the image of the concision, clarity, accessibility and blind justice
tendency of European jural conceptions. Yet another rigidifying process was
the conversion of the sharfa court into a body that operated on the doctrine of

56 See, e.g., Y. Alon, 'The tribal system in the face of the state formation process: Mandatory
Transjordan, 1921 46', IJMES, 37 (2005).

57 M. van Creveld, The rise and decline of the state (Cambridge, 2000), pp. 155 70.

58 R. Singha, A despotism of law: Crime and justice in early colonial India (Delhi, 1998), pp. 2,
49 75-

59 N. Dirks, The scandal of empire: India and the creation of imperial Britain (Cambridge, MA,
2006), p. 221.

180

Islamic law

stare decisis, the obligation of courts to follow the uncontroversial previous
judicial decisions of higher courts.

This system could have evolved in Islam, but for a good reason did not. The
shar7a assigned legal expertise and, more importantly, epistemic authority to

the mufti and author jurist, ° not to the qadi, who, while possessing more or
less the same amount of legal knowledge as did his British counterpart, was
deemed qua qadi 1 insufficiently qualified to 'make' law. Ijtihadic herme
neutics was the very feature that distinguished Islamic law from modern
codified legal systems, a feature that permitted this law to reign supreme in,
and accommodate, as varied and diverse cultures, subcultures, local moralities
and customary practices as those that flourished in Java, Malabar, Khurasan,
Madagascar, Syria and Morocco. But in so far as judicial practice was con
cerned, the bindingness of a ruling according to the specifically British doc
trine of precedent deprived the qadi of the formerly wider array of opinions to
choose from in the light of the facts presented in the case. Once a determi
nation of law in a specific case was made binding, as would happen in a British
court, the otherwise unceasing hermeneutical activities of the Muslim mufti
cum author jurist were rendered pointless; indeed, he would subsequently
disappear from the legal as well as the intellectual life of the jural community.

The doctrine of stare decisis also stimulated far reaching changes in the way
the courts worked. The product of an intensive book keeping culture, the
logic of stare decisis required the maintenance of a systematic recording of law
reports, an activity which began in some parts of India during the early
decades of the thirteenth/ nineteenth century and which was systematised
for the whole colony in the Indian Law Reports Act of 1875. A by product of
this process one of whose attributes was an unwavering emphasis upon the
physical act of recording data was a fundamental change in the Islamic law of
evidence, where oral testimony based on integrity, morality and rectitude was
paradigmatic. Long before the 1875 Act the British began the practice of
recording testimony, which, once committed to the court record, also
acquired a fixed form. But this was an interim development, for the British

introduced further reforms in 1861 and 1872, whereby the English law of
procedure fully supplanted both its Islamic and Anglo Muhammadan
counterparts.

Anglo Muhammadan law, however, was an interim colonialist solution
that
mediated the British domination of India until the uprising of 1857. The
1860s

60 Two juristic roles discussed in detail in Hallaq, Authority, pp. 166 235.
61 On the epistemic authority of the qadi qua qadi see ibid., pp. 168 74.

and 1870s witnessed the abolition of slavery, as well as of the Islamic
laws of
procedure, criminal law and evidence. All these were superseded by
British
laws enacted by statute. By the end of the century, and with the
exception of
family law and certain elements of property transactions, all indigenous
laws
had been supplanted by British law. But all this was introduced
piecemeal,
answering, in an ad hoc and generally incremental manner, the growing
anxiety of the British to exercise control over their Indian subjects,
especially
after the rebellion of 1857. In this picture, Anglo Muhammadan law repre
sented no more than a middle stage permitting the solidification of the
colonialist hold over economic, political and legal power.

The process through which legal power was transferred to the hands of
the
modern state continued unabated under the new and now independent
nationalist regimes throughout the Muslim world. What was left for the
sharTa to regulate, as we have said, was personal status, including such
areas as inheritance, child custody and gifts. While the popular Muslim

imagination, even today, appears to hold these remnants of the sharta to be

an authentic and genuine expression oifiqhl family law, the fact of the matter is

that even this sphere of law underwent structural and foundational changes

that ultimately resulted in severing it from both the substance of classical fiqh

and the methodology by which fiqh had operated. This severance was effected

through various devices that included both administrative and interpretive

techniques. Attributed to nebulous origins in Islamic tradition and history,

these modern devices were cultivated and augmented to yield results that had

never been entertained before.

The first of these devices was the adoption of the principle of necessity marginal in traditional law, but now given a much wider scope to justify a utilitarian approach to the promulgation of laws. Simply put, that which is

deemed necessary becomes justifiable as a matter of law. The second device

was procedural, which is to say that, without changing certain parts of Islamic

substantive law, it was possible through this device to exclude particular claims from judicial enforcement, thus in effect leaving fiqhi law mere ink on dusty paper. The third device, one of the most effective methods by which

new positive law was created from the virtual dispersal cum restructuring of

fiqh, consisted of an eclectic approach that operated on two levels: takhayyur

and talfiq (lit. 'selection' and 'amalgamation'). The former involved the incorporation not only of weak and discredited opinions from the school, but also of opinions held by other schools not followed in the country adopting them. The options opened up by this device seemed boundless, since not only could Twelver Shfite opinions be absorbed by the codes of

182

Sunni countries, but also those of the long defunct Zahirite school. Talfiq
involved an even more daring technique. While takhayyur required the
plucking of opinions, for a single code, from various schools, talfiq
amounted
to combining elements of one opinion from various quarters within and
without the school. The product thereof was entirely new, because the
opinions now combined had originally belonged to altogether different
and
perhaps incongruent premises. 2 The fourth device was the so called neo
ijtihad, an interpretive approach that is largely free of what we have here
called
Arabicate hermeneutics. In a sense, the second device of takhayyur cum
talfiq
rests on this general approach, since the act of combining different, if not
divergent, elements of one opinion entails a measure of interpretive
freedom.
The fifth and final device, much like the first, represented a new
application of
the old but restricted principle that any law that does not contradict the
sharTa
may be deemed lawful.

In their entirety, therefore, these devices did the bidding of the state in
absorbing the Islamic legal tradition into its well defined structures of
codifi
cation. In the so called reform process, many of the rights of women and
children were expanded and improved, but many others resulted in priva
tions. Partha Chatterjee's characterisation in the context of nationalism
may
be aptly applied to the modern state's legal engineering, which
'conferred
upon women the honor of a new social responsibility and by associating
the
task of female emancipation with the historical goal of sovereign
nationhood,
bound them to a narrow, and yet entirely legitimate, subordination'. 63

62 See H. Liebesny, Law of the Near and Middle East (Albany, 1975), p.
138; Hallaq, History,
pp. 210, 261.

63 Partha Chatterjee, 'Colonialism, nationalism, and colonized women:
The contest in

India', American Ethnologist, 16, 4 (1989), pp. 629 32. For a detailed account of legal
modernisation and the concomitant production of a new patriarchy see Hallaq, Sharia:
Theory, practice, transformations.

5

Conversion and the ahl al-dhimma

DAVID J. WASSERSTEIN

The problem

The word islam means 'submission', 'submitting', and conversion to Islam involves nothing more, at base, than submitting oneself to God. It has consequences legal, fiscal and especially social in different contexts, but its religious aspect consists of just the formal recognition of the one God and of
Muhammad as His messenger. Reciting the formula la ilaha ilia Allah, Muhammad rasul Allah is enough. The act of coming to Islam is thus very simple. The worldwide spread of a faith that at first was exclusively that of the
inhabitants of the Arabian Peninsula was, however, much more complex as
Islam came for centuries also to mean an empire created and at first largely
ruled over by Arabs and a culture dominated by Islam: 'civilization and Islam
went together'. 1

Between 632 and about 1500 the great majority of the people between the
Atlantic and India, and many beyond, converted to Islam. Who did it, when,
where, how and above all why? What was the meaning of conversion, for

converts and for those around them, their new co religionists and their former
ones? Can we measure the degree or rate of conversion in different societies
and areas of the Islamic world? Did it happen all at once or over a longer
period of time? Was it voluntary or did converts change their faith under
compulsion? What happened to those left behind, those who did not undergo
conversion?

We have less direct evidence and source material for this most important of
the transformations brought by Muhammad than for many others, such as the
Arabicisation in language of the lands between the Atlantic and the Persian
Gulf. Description and explanation are accordingly not easy. Variety of many

1 The phrase comes from Natalie Zemon Davis, Trickster travels: A sixteenth century Muslim
between worlds (New York, 2006), p. 149.

184

Conversion and the ahl al dhimma

sorts, in different times and places, increases our difficulty further. And in
large parts of the early conquests, Islamisation was intimately tied up with two
other processes, linguistic and ethnic acculturation to the Arab rulers, without,
however, being coterminous with them.

Reasons for conversion

Motives for conversion appear at first sight easy to classify: heading the list
should be acceptance of the message brought by Muhammad. When we read
the biography of the Prophet himself, and occasionally also accounts of later
generations, this is indeed what we find: someone hears a statement about
Islam that dramatically dismisses his commitment to his earlier faith and
brings him over to Islam, a simpler version of the road to Damascus and
one travelled by very many over the centuries. Al Tufayl ibn 'Amr al Dawsi
came to the Prophet, and 'the apostle explained Islam to me and recited the
Quran to me. By God I never heard anything finer nor anything more just. So I
became a Muslim and bore true witness.' Then he went home and told his
father and his wife about his new religion, and each of them in turn said, 'All
right, then my religion is your religion.' 2. Charismatic, if also laconic, con
versions of this sort are among the most commonly reported in the sources,
but there must be doubt both as to their authenticity and as to their numbers.
The bareness of the account in most cases provides little explanatory support
for those outside the circle of the faithful.

Doubt also attends autobiographical accounts by converts. These, still more
than other autobiographies, tend to the self serving, and, like many texts of
interreligious polemic, have more the character of set piece literary constructs
than of genuine spiritual journeying. The Ifham al Yahud of Samaw'al
al MaghribI, of the sixth/twelfth century, is a good case in point. Its very
title, 'Silencing the Jews', reveals that it is at least as much concerned with
apologetic polemic and missionising among its author's former co religionists
as with describing the spiritual life of its author. So too in the case of another
ex Jew from north Africa, 'Abd al Haqq al Islami, author of a work entitled
'The sword stretched out in refutation of the rabbis of the Jews'. 3

2 Ibn Ishaq, The life of Muhammad (Strat Rasul Allah), trans, with introduction and notes
Alfred Guillaume (Oxford, 1955), pp. 175 7.

3 'Abd al Haqq al Islami, al Sayfal mamdudfx al radd 'aid ahbdr al yahud (Espada extendida
para refutar a los sabios judios), ed., trans, and with notes and introd. Esperanza Alfonso
(Madrid, 1998).

185

The New Cambridge History of Islam

Conversion as part of larger social processes offers additional motives for our understanding. While we can still see the individual moving over to Islam,
he (or she) appears now as an anonymous face in a crowd, choreographed by
such motivations as the desire to preserve or improve socio economic position
or to change cultural identity. A major source of converts in the early Umayyad period following the initial conquests was prisoners of war, enslaved and then manumitted and converted to the faith of their new rulers. 4
Under the later Umayyads converts came especially from fugitive peasants,
escaping taxes in their villages for the safety and anonymity of the large garrison cities and converting along the way. Papyri from Egypt as well as
literary sources portray them as converting purely in order to evade taxation.
Governors would be instructed to send them back home, and to collect the
taxes. 5 Conversion to the faith of the rulers did not, however, in this early
period mean adoption into the ranks of the rulers. As Crone remarks, 'the Arabs were not always willing to share their God with gentile converts'. At a

higher social level things could be handled differently, and a number of non

Muslim rulers in Khurasan and the eastern Iranian region in the reigns of al Mahdi (158 69/775 85) and al Ma'mun (198 218/813 33), wishing to main

tain their status and to retain their positions in the new dispensation, were able

to surrender their thrones to the caliph and receive them back by converting

and becoming clients (mawalT) of Islam. 7 In similar fashion, several marcher

lords in northern Spain, between Islamic and Christian areas of control, like

the Banu Qasi, converted to Islam and continued to dominate border terri tories, intermarrying with both Christian and Muslim families as circum stances and opportunity permitted.

All of these, despite the great numbers involved, are individual conversions.
We also find mass conversions, as for example among the Berbers of North

Africa, with entire tribes accepting Islam as part of the process of conquest in

the course of the seventh century. Similar phenomena of mass conversion are

found among other tribes and nomads, especially among the Turks who

4 Patricia Crone, Staves on horses: The evolution of the Islamic polity (Cambridge, 1980),
pp. 49 51-

5 Gladys Frantz Murphy, 'Conversion in early Islamic Egypt: The economic factor', in
Documents lie I'Islam medieval: Nouvelles perspectives de recherche, actes de la table ronde, Paris,
3 5 mars 1988 (Paris, 1991). For other examples of conversion due to economic distress see
Milka Levy Rubin, 'New evidence relating to the process of Islamization in Palestine in
the early Muslim period: The case of Samaria', JESHO, 43 (2000).

6 Crone, Slaves on horses, p. 49; also pp. 40 53.

7 Ibid., pp. 76 7.

8 See Michael Brett, 'The spread of Islam in Egypt and north Africa', in Michael Brett (ed.),

Northern Africa: Islam and modernization (London, 1973); also Henri
Teissier, 'La

Conversion and the ahl al dhimma

entered the Islamic world during the early Middle Ages, both those who
came
as mercenaries and those who came as conquerors, and later on in
Central
Asia. What the real religious meaning of such conversion can have been
for
the individual is difficult to say. However, as with similar mass religious
transformations in England at about the same time (and also in Iceland
and
Kiev somewhat later), the new faith struck deep roots fairly fast. Berber
rebellions in North Africa and al Andalus after the first generation or so
do
not take anti Islamic form, but opt rather for variety within the fold of
Islam
in this not very different from Berber behaviour centuries earlier with
respect
to Christianity.

How to convert

How did they convert? At the start, as we have seen, conversion could be
very
informal. Later on things became more ordered. We know a little about
this,
especially as we have, in several legal formularies from al Andalus, the
texts of
documents 'for the conversion' of various types of individual a Christian
man, a Jewish woman, a Majusi etc. The texts differ slightly, to take
account of
the varying backgrounds of the converts and the different faiths and
beliefs
(as understood by Muslim lawyers) that they are required explicitly to
renounce as they become Muslims. The Christian attests that 'the Masih
Jesus son of Mary, may God bless him and give him peace, is His servant,

His envoy, His word and His breath that He sent unto Mary', the Jew, that
'Moses and Ezra together with the other prophets are His servants and envoys'. 9 These documents lay jargonised legal stress on the voluntary aspect
of the convert's abandonment of his former faith and his adoption of Islam
('being of sound mind and good health, enjoying full possession of his mental
faculties and legal capacity' 10). This was a necessity for the validity of the
conversion as a formal act in an organised society (and something we find also
in medieval Christendom).

desaparicion de la antigua iglesia de Africa', in Henri Teissier and Ramon Lourido Diaz
(eds.), El Cristianismo en el norte de Africa (n.p., 1993); Elizabeth Savage, 'Conversion or
metamorphosis: the Christian population after the Islamic conquest', in Mark Horton
and Thomas Wiedemann (eds.), North Africa from Antiquity to Islam: Papers of a conference
held at Bristol, October 1994 (Bristol, 1994).

9 See Pedro Chalmeta, 'Le passage a l'lslam dans al Andalus au Xe siecle', in Adas del XII
Congreso de la UEAI (Malaga, 1984) (Madrid, 1986), p. 163; M. Abumalham, 'La conversion
segiin formularios notariales andalusies: valoracion de la legalidad de la conversion de
Maimonides', Misceldnea de estudios drabes y hebraicos, 34 (1985), p. 72.

10 See the references in the preceding note.

187

These are forms and come from legal minds and a later period, when things
had settled down, not from the inchoate early period of the conquests. Too
great a concern with these, for all their importance, can obscure the larger
picture. In the case of mass conversions of Berber tribes, we can scarcely
imagine entire tribes queuing up, whether to sign off on legal documents
illiterates signing documents drawn up in a non literate society, in a script and
a language which they did not know or to affirm orally the oneness of God
and the status of His Messenger. Similarly, at another extreme, the picture
drawn by the Spanish scholar Mikel de Epalza, of Andalusi Christians becom
ing Muslims by default as a result of the absence in al Andalus of duly ordained
bishops or priests, should be rejected as too rigid in its view of Christian canon
law in practice, of Islamic notions of conversion and of individual realities on
the ground." What both do suggest, rather, is the delineation of conditions in
which Islam could grow with some ease, encouraged by its status, socially and
politically, and by the practical impossibility of apostasy, a capital crime under
Islamic law.

Rates of conversion

How fast did the overall process occur? Did it progress at the same rate
everywhere? Some significant moments can be observed. In Egypt economic
motives, taxation of non Muslims and the attractions of employment that
required conversion began the process, and the repression of tax revolts in
238/852 and after gave additional impetus to large scale conversion. Under the
Mamluks, too, in 700/1301 and again in 755/1354, anti Christian rioting per
suaded large numbers of Christians to convert, and at various dates, for
example under the Fatimid caliph al Hakim (r. 386 411/996 1021), confiscation
of Church properties helped to impoverish the Christian community and

drive Christians into Islam. 12 In al Andalus the failure of the so called martyrs
of Cordoba in the mid third/ninth century to arouse Christian reaction to

11 M. de Epalza, 'Mozarabs: An emblematic Christian minority in Islamic al Andalus', in
Salma Khadra Jayyusi (ed.), Tfie legacy of Muslim Spain, Handbuch der Orientalistik 1,
12 (Leiden, 1992).

12 For Egypt see Frantz Murphy, 'Conversion'; Yaakov Lev, 'Persecutions and conversion
to Islam in eleventh century Egypt', Asian and African Studies, 22 (1988); Donald P. Little,
'Coptic converts to Islam during the Bahri Mamluk period', in Michael Gervers and
Ramzi Jibran Bikhazi (eds.), Conversion and continuity: Indigenous Christian communities in
Islamic lands, eighth to eighteenth centuries, Papers in Medieval Studies 9 (Toronto, 1990).
See now also Tamer el Leithy, 'Coptic culture and conversion in medieval Cairo,
1293 1524 AD', Ph.D. thesis, Princeton University (2005).

Conversion and the ahl al dhimma

Muslim rule gave added impetus to conversion, and by the fourth/tenth century we find Christians going over to Arabic and giving up Latin even for religious purposes. However, while Muslims were probably a majority in
alAndalus by the fifth/ eleventh century, we cannot point to any decisive events there that precipitated conversion en masse. 13 In the sixth/twelfth
century the Almohads dealt terrible blows to the remaining Christian com munities in al Andalus, as well as in North Africa. But by that time Christians,

to say nothing of Jews and other non Muslims, all over the Islamic world were
greatly reduced, and they faced broader social pressures inducing them to
convert.

Some apparently significant moments may be less significant than they
appear: the Sufi shaykh Ibrahim ibn Shahriyar al Kazarum (352 426/963 1035),
from south western Iran, was a grandson of Zoroastrian converts. He himself
worked hard to proselytise for Islam among the Zoroastrians, though with
little success. He also wanted to build the first Friday mosque in Kazarun, but
every time his followers started to build it the structure was destroyed by the
local Zoroastrians. Throughout 370/981 the shaykh had to pray outside in the
fields. Finally, he saw the Prophet in a dream, working at building a mosque
himself. From that time on, the building of the mosque went ahead success
fully, the Zoroastrians ceased their interference and even gradually came over
to Islam, and the shaykh eventually made a total of 24,000 converts.

Morony has seen this story as evidence of the presence of larger numbers of
rural than of urban Zoroastrians in the region. Yavari, by contrast, prefers to
see the story as recalling the struggles of the Prophet against his contempo
raries in Mecca and his success in finally setting up a community in Medina. 14
Yavari stresses that we should not look for historical data in a story like this. It
comes from a hagiographical context. The literary and the historiographical
contexts of such stories are what give them their meaning. 15

In the absence of much direct evidence for conversion, questions about the
rate of conversion seemed for long impossible to answer. However, in 1979,

13 The best work on this topic is still E. P. Colbert, The martyrs of Cordoba, 8;o 859: A study of
the sources (Washington, DC, 1962); see also Jessica A. Coope, 'Religious and cultural
conversion to Islam in ninth century Umayyad Cordoba', Journal of World History,

4 (i993).

14 See David W. Damrel, 'Some aspects of Sufis, miracles and conversion in 16th century
Central Asia', Journal of Central Asian Studies, 5 (1994), p. 7, for a similar point.

15 See Michael Morony, 'The age of conversions: A reassessment', in Gervers and Bikhazi
(eds.), Conversion and continuity, pp. 137, 144; Neguin Yavari, 'The conversion stories of
Shaykh Abu Ishaq Kazarum, in Guyda Armstrong and Ian N. Wood (eds.), Christianizing
peoples and converting individuals, International medieval research 7 (Turnhout, 2000),
pp. 242 6.

The New Cambridge History of Islam

Richard Bulliet suggested a possible avenue to advance on this issue. 16 He
proposed using the huge, repetitive, and hence quantifiable, resources of the
medieval Arabic biographical dictionaries. Noting that their contents offered a
random and hence representative cross section of their populations, that they
rarely mentioned non Islamic names in genealogies, that these seemed to
occur at the earliest point in the genealogies, and that they were often
succeeded by names carrying Islamic significance, he suggested that we
could see here the generation of conversion in multiple individual cases.
Analysis of the material by geography and by period with all the difficulties
that these threw up could show us how fast people who converted in
different areas did so. Bulliet's theory has much to commend it, not least

the fact that it appears to conform to our general impressions, based on other,
largely anecdotal, sources, of how things were. His analysis shows, for example, that Iran probably had a Muslim majority as much as a century earlier than Syria. And for problematic areas, such as al Andalus, where the
body of relevant information is too small to carry statistically persuasive force,
the conclusions to which the information points nevertheless agree with what
might be expected from a comparison with other areas at comparable periods
in the development of their Islamisation.

Bulliet's use of methods of statistical analysis and models borrowed from the hard and social sciences, as well as his dependence on graphs for the exposition of much of his argument, made his hypothesis difficult for many
Islamicists to accept, sometimes even to understand it seems to remain impossible for some to understand Bulliet's explanation that all of his quanti
fied assertions concern only the portion of a total population that actually,
over time, converted to Islam (not least because the biographical dictionaries
cover only Muslims). Thus if only 80 per cent converted, a suggestion about
70 per cent of the conversion having taken place would refer only to some 56
per cent of the population (70 per cent of 80 per cent = 56 per cent in fact
things are a little more complex than this) and not to 70 per cent of the population as a whole. We know very little about medieval population sizes,
and we can know next to nothing about such matters as the size of the unconverted parts of any population. 17 The distinction escaped many readers
of the book, and helped to demonstrate the continuing difficulty of using such
non humanistic techniques in this field.

16 Richard W. Bulliet, Conversion to Islam in the medieval period: An essay in quantitative
history (Cambridge, MA, 1979).

17 David Ayalon, 'Regarding population estimates in the countries of medieval Islam',
JESHO, 28 (1985).

Conversion and the ahl al dhimma

Bulliet's analysis did not take into account two further elements of possible
difficulty: first, the huge numbers of converts, mentioned above, resulting
from the conquests, the enslavement of prisoners of war and their subsequent
manumission and Islamisation; and second, the flight of the peasants to evade
taxation. The great numbers and the population movements involved in both,
while they do not necessarily invalidate the conclusions he offered, never
theless need to be taken into account in any reckoning of the early period of
conversion.

A further difficulty with Bulliet's hypothesis is that, more than is the case
with historical analysis generally, it does not lend itself to any form of external
testing or verification. It depends critically, for example, on the assumption
that, overall, the genealogies given in the biographical dictionaries are both
authentic and correct. Such an assumption is untestable for any but isolated
cases, and it can also be challenged more broadly. The degree to which such a
challenge can be faced down is debatable.

The reconstruction by region and by period that Bulliet's theory provided
also permitted him to attempt a broad co relation between observed rates of
conversion and other developments. Two in particular deserve notice: first,
the rise and relative strength in different areas of the various Islamic law
schools; and second, the rise of independent or semi independent dynasties in
different regions of the early Islamic world.

Why should particular law schools win so many adherents in one place, only to see others dominate elsewhere? Bulliet argued that the varying success of different schools the Hanafis as against the Shafi'is, for example, in Iran reflected the particular stages that Islamisation had reached in different places. Similarly, in the case of the emergence of local dynasties, such as the Tahirids in Iran (205 59/821 73) or the Tulunids in Egypt (254 92/868 905), he was able to argue that they reflected the development of conversion to a point where there was no fear of non Islamic rule returning, with the added implication that the caliphate was now far less necessary as a focal institution for a unitary Islamic state. Again, however, in the absence of other evidence, his hypothesis here as earlier remains attractive even plausible rather than wholly convincing.

Bulliet's hypothesis was of importance in at least two ways. It transformed the medieval Arabic biographical dictionaries into a new type (for Islamic studies) of historical source; and it offered answers to problems going far beyond those of conversion and Islamisation alone. It did so for the critical early period of mass conversion in the heartlands of what, as a result of just such conversion, became the Islamic world as distinct from merely an

191

The New Cambridge History of Islam

empire ruled by Muslims. At the same time, Bulliet's innovativeness turned out to be also a limitation: biographical dictionaries either do not exist or cannot for extraneous reasons be used for other periods and areas; parallel

sources seem to be absent; and, not least because of the change in the size and
character of Islamic societies wrought by conversion, the historical problems
that Bulliet sought to use his approach to solve are largely absent there too.

Conversion outside the heartlands

In consequence, despite the exciting character of this marriage of modern
quantitative analysis (and marketing strategies) with repetitive medieval
Arabic texts, study of the underlying problem has turned in two directions
since 1979. On the one hand, there has been a return to smaller scale case
studies of conversion incidents or individuals or places. On the other, there
have been more attempts to study later areas of Islamic growth, beyond
the lands of the early conquests, where Islam has expanded largely without
conquest, such as sub Saharan Africa and Central and South East Asia. 1 Here
scholars have offered a variety of models to account for the penetration and
growth of Islam.

In the absence of conquest in many of these areas, conversion had social but
no legal implications; further, in non literate societies documentation of
conversion was impracticable and offered no benefit. Penetration and con
version were generally peaceful, resulting from cultural and economic contact
between different groups, and encouraged by the simplicity and adaptability
of Islam. Islamisation was accordingly less clear cut and could be less definitive
than in the earlier conquests. At the same time, it overlapped very often with
the expansion of political Islam, and the two can sometimes scarcely be
distinguished from each other. In these areas legend abounds and patterns
are more varied.

Africa

In Africa Berbers brought Islam across the Sahara, and it was carried south
wards from one group to another by traders. They established economic

18 See the articles collected in Nehemia Levtzion (ed.), Conversion to Islam (New York and
London, 1979); Gervers and Bikhazi (eds.), Conversion and continuity; Mercedes Garcia
Arenal (ed.), Conversions islamiques: Identites religieuses en Islam mediterraneen (Paris,
2001); and, for a comparative perspective, Christopher Lamb and M. Darrol Bryant
(eds.), Religious conversion: Contemporary practices and controversies (London, 1999).

Conversion and the ahl al dhimma

networks whose importance was recognised by rulers and was supported by
them. Not only did they establish trading links, they also made themselves
visible by building mosques (often in very distinctive local styles), created
links with other Islamic centres and developed local traditions of Islamic
scholarship. Lineages of Muslim scholar traders in such places as Gao
(in Mali), Timbuktu and elsewhere offered a focus for other Muslims from
outside and attracted interest from locals for religious and cultural as well as
economic reasons. 19 The economic benefits brought by the traders gave them
easy access to rulers; rulers fostered such contact in order the better to control
the traders and benefit from their activity; Islam represented a high culture
through association with which a chief might win prestige; the prayers and
amulets that Muslims could offer protected chiefs against droughts or plots;
the moral and legal structures of Islam offered a convenient standard both for
individual behaviour and for generalised trading rules.

Nonetheless, the advance of Islam was fitful. Sometimes only the ruling

elite would convert. In Malal, beyond upper Senegal, the prayers and sacrifices
of the local priests could not end a drought. A Muslim promised to pray for
relief if the king accepted Islam. He taught the king some prayers and passages
from the Qur'an, and the next Friday the king and the Muslim prayed together. At dawn rain began to fall abundantly. The king destroyed the local idols, expelled the sorcerers and converted, together with his family and the nobility. However the common people, we are told, remained pagans. 20

Paganism could even return. The empire of Mali, whose ruler Mansa Musa
travelled in great magnificence through Egypt on the hajj to Mecca in the eighth/fourteenth century, went into a decline in the following century. It lost
direct contact with Muslim centres, Muslim traders abandoned the capital and,
though Muslims still served the ruler, there was a slide back towards paganism. 21

The role of teachers, as in the case from Malal just mentioned, reflects the
importance of traders and scholars, often the same individuals, in bringing
Islam to new areas, in East as in West Africa. In East Africa Muslim traders
settled on the coast of Ethiopia as early as the second/eighth century, and by

19 Elias N. Saad, Social history of Timbuktu: The role of Muslim scholars and notables 1400 1900
(Cambridge, 1983).

20 Nehemia Levtzion, 'Patterns of Islamization in West Africa', in Daniel F. McCall and
Norman R. Bennett (eds.), Aspects of West African Islam, Boston University Papers on
Africa 5 (Boston, 1971), p. 33, quoting al Bakri (fifth/ eleventh century).

21 Ibid., p. 35.

the third/ninth Muslim communities along the routes inland were growing
into small states. Harar, the most important of these, became a centre for
learning as well as trade, and Islam gradually attracted converts from among
the ruling classes of the nomadic tribes of the region, though without ever
succeeding in eliminating the Christianity of Ethiopia.

India

More Muslims live east of Karachi than west of it. Islam came to the Indian
subcontinent early, with Muslim armies reaching Sind (now in Pakistan) in the
same year as the conquest of Spain, 92/711. However, it was not until the time
of the Ghaznavids and the Ghurids, from the late fourth/tenth to the seventh/
thirteenth centuries, that large advances were made. The Ghurids in particular
won huge areas of northern India, laying the foundations for the later vast
spread of Islam there.

Richard Eaton identifies a problem with our understanding of conversion in
India. 22, He argues that the three theories traditionally held to explain conversion
in India do not work, principally because the areas of massive conversion, East
Bengal and West Punjab, were paradoxically those that saw less political
penetration by Islam. Where political Islam penetrated most strongly, he points
out, conversion was less thoroughgoing. Foreign rule, by Turco Iranian
invaders between the seventh/thirteenth and the twelfth/eighteenth centuries,
did not bring massive conversion in its wake. Economic disabilities, or employ
ment possibilities, what he labels political patronage', also do not explain mass

conversion. Accordingly, he has litde time for the great rulers of subcontinental
Islam as agents of conversion. As for the notion that conversion offered an
escape from the caste system of Hinduism, it is rarely referred to in the sources,
it does not seem generally to have had a liberating, equalising effect in India and,
most importantly, East Bengal and West Punjab were in any case not properly
integrated into the Hindu caste system at the time of the massive conversions to
Islam, so that this claim has little relevance here.

In place of these theories Eaton offers a new and highly attractive theory, which he sums up in the words accretion and reform. 23 He suggests that

22 Richard Eaton, 'Approaches to the study of conversion to Islam in India', in Richard
C. Martin (ed.), Approaches to Islam in religious studies (Tucson, 1985).

23 Ibid.; Richard Eaton, 'Who are the Bengal Muslims? Conversion and Islamization in
Bengal', in Richard Eaton, Essays on Islam and Indian history (New Delhi, 2000), repr. in
Rowena Robinson and Sathianathan Clarke (eds.), Religious conversion in India: Modes,
motivations, and meanings (New Delhi, 2003).

194

Conversion and the ahl al dhimma

people living in a pre literate society on the ecological and political frontier of
an expanding agrarian society were the more easily absorbed into that society's religious ideology. Both East Bengal and West Punjab were fringe

areas, on the socio ecological frontier of Hindu agrarian society and the political frontier of Islamic society. Eaton sees agents of change in Muslim qadis, who could offer judgment for Muslims and non Muslims alike, in the appeal of a written and hence unchanging Qur'an to a pre literate society, and to some degree also in Sufis. But Sufis were far from being the missionaries that they have been seen as in the past. Rather, he points out, after their deaths Sufis could work miracles: their shrines and their descendants possessed baraka. In the Punjab from the seventh/thirteenth century we find huge Sufi shrines for Jats who were migrating into the area. The many hundreds of shrines to different Sufi saints all over India served to present the Islamic God in a locally accessible idiom.

That idiom was expressed in various ways. Islamic names, for example, in our sources increased among the Sials in the Punjab from 10 per cent in the early ninth/fifteenth century to 56 per cent in the mid eleventh/ seventeenth, and reached 100 per cent in the early thirteenth/nineteenth. The progression is slow, as he notes, but it is definite. Similar changes can be observed in the growth in the use of names for God denoting Islamic attributes of the divine and in the building of mosques.

Islam in India is a religion of the plough, as it is also part of the machinery of agrarianisation, taming the wilderness, clearing the jungle, establishing mar kets and introducing a cash economy. Thus a poet in the late tenth /sixteenth century writes: 24

From the South came the harvesters,

Five hundred of them came under one organizer.
From the West came Zafar Mian,

Together with twenty two thousand men.
Sulaimani beads in their hands,

They chanted the names of their pir and the Prophet.

Having cleared the forest,

They established markets.
Hundreds and hundreds of foreigners

Ate and entered the forest.
Hearing the sound of the axe,

The tiger became apprehensive and ran away, roaring.

24 Mukundaram, Candi Mangala, cited in Eaton, 'Who are the Bengal Muslims?', p. 267
(Religious conversion, pp. 85 6).

195

Political change and new forms of transport, improving contact with
Mecca, especially from the twelfth/eighteenth century onwards, led to greater
integration into the broader world of Islam. The increased awareness of the
normative unity of Islam led to Eaton's second stage, that of reform. This was
expressed in a greater literalness in understanding of the Qur] an and, above
all, in more social exclusiveness at the local level. The result, Eaton suggests,
was the demand for a separate Muslim state when the British withdrew in
1947, and, curiously, the adoption of Arab culture as a kind of supra national
model of Islam in the Indian context.

Eaton's theory explains religious change in social terms, describing Islam in
India as appealing to non literate, non agricultural populations, not part of the

Hindu caste system. The gradual accretion, in the first stage of his model, of
elements of Islamic social behaviour and the initial syncretism with neigh
bouring cultures and religions share much with what happens elsewhere,
particularly in South East Asia.

South-East Asia

Islam seems to have reached different parts of South East Asia between the
end of the seventh/ thirteenth and the eleventh/ seventeenth centuries. This is
one of the most poorly documented periods in the history of the region. 25 The
bulk of the sources are late and legendary, and concerned with just a single
place in this vast area of 13,000 islands. They tend to relate the introduction of
Islam in a particular locality as the sudden conversion, occasionally with
miraculous intervention by the Prophet, of the ruler and the ruling elite.
The mass of the populace has little more than walk on parts in these stories,
whose aim seems to be rather to legitimise an existing dynasty's adoption of
Islam than to provide historical information. 2 Thus in North Sumatra around
696/12.97 a local ruler saw the Prophet in a dream, discovered on awakening
that he was circumcised, and found himself reciting the shahada and all thirty
sections of the Qur] an, even though he had never been taught any of it and did
not know a word of Arabic. Following the arrival of a ship bearing a Muslim
shaykh 'the whole population willingly recited the profession of faith, in all
sincerity and with belief in their hearts'. 27

25 M. C. Ricklefs, A history of modern Indonesia since c. 1200, 3rd edn (Basingstoke, 2001), p. 3,
says: 'The spread of Islam is one of the most significant processes of Indonesian history,
but also one of the most obscure.'

26 Russell Jones, 'Ten conversion myths from Indonesia', in Levtzion (ed.), Conversion.

27 Ibid., pp. 134 5.

196

Conversion and the ahl al dhimma

Islam was, however, present even in northern Sumatra earlier than 696 1
1297, for we have the tombstone of another ruler there dated 608/1211.
What is not clear in most places is whether the conversion of the ruler and
the elite really did involve the conversion of the mass of the population. An
apothecary from Lisbon, Tome Pires, who spent three years in Malacca
between 1512 and 1515, reports that there were still some non Muslim rulers
in Sumatra in his time, though the majority were already Muslims. He also
reports local people converting to Islam. 2 Is this an indication of wider
social transformation?

In the absence of evidence, history is re modelled and simplified in later
literature. In the thirteenth/nineteenth century Pakubuwana VI, a Javanese
king exiled by the Dutch, composed a poem, the Babadjaka tingkir (Story of
a youth), in which he described the Islamisation of the island and the
building of a monumental mosque in Demak in the early tenth/ sixteenth
century: 2,9

Now at that time in Java's land

All had become Moslem

There was none who did resist

All the mountain hermits

The ascetics and acolytes, the devotees and disciples

Many converted to the Faith.

And the royal Buddhist and Saivite monks, the Hindu priests
Were exchanged for fuqaha lawyers
Great and mighty pundits
Excellent ulama

Why! Even of the foreign kings
Who were to Java vassal
Many had become Moslem

The agents of Islamisation in Indonesia are still unclear. International trade
appears to be a necessary element in this, for it brought the islands into contact
with the world of Islam. But trade seems to have been there for a long time
before conversion took off, so trade in itself is not the explanation. In different
places Muslim merchants, both visitors and settlers, intermarriage with locals,
converted rulers and local elites, learned mystics and Sufis and holy men too

28 Ricklefs, History, p. 4.

29 Translated in Nancy K. Florida, Writing the past, inscribing the future: History as prophecy
in colonial Java (Durham, NC, and London, 1995), p. 155.

197

The New Cambridge History of Islam

are all plausible agents of diffusion, but we do not have the evidence to be
sure, so scholarly hypotheses abound.

Turks and Mongols

The Turks of Central Asia had experience of Islam very early. Turkish slaves
had been bought by Islamic rulers, trained as soldiers and converted to Islam
as early as the middle of the third/ninth century. 30 Other Turks later con
quered and Islamised Anatolia. 31 Soldiery of Turkish background, whether
imported individually as slaves or invading in groups as conquerors, came to
rule large parts of the eastern Islamic world from the fourth/ tenth century for
nearly a millennium. Other Turks and Mongols, who invaded the Iranian
region and came close to taking over the whole of the Islamic world,
converted to Islam in Central Asia.

The reasons for the change of faith appear to have been mixtures of raison
d'etat and spiritual conversion. Some of the stories that we have about the
conversions of individual rulers are clearly pious or political legends thus the
father of Berke Khan, who succeeded as ruler of the Golden Horde 01655/1257,
is said to have given him as a baby to a Muslim midwife to cut his navel string
and give him milk (another version of the story has the baby Berke already
born as a Muslim, refuse his mother's milk and wait until a Muslim midwife
gave him her milk) others may well be true. 32 Michal Biran has recently
argued that the conversion of Tarmashirin Khan in around 730/1330
(he reigned from 731/1331 to 735/1334) generated no legends because he was
not the first Muslim ruler in his dynasty and because he was a relative failure
during his brief reign, but above all because he (and his descendants) would

30 Crone, Slaves on horses; David Ayalon, 'The military reforms of Caliph al Mu'tasim:
Their background and consequences', in David Ayalon, Islam and the abode of war:
Military slaves and Islamie adversaries (Aldershot, 1994), Item I. For possible exceptions
see David Ayalon, 'On the eunuchs in Islam', JSAI, 1 (1979), p. 69 (repr. in Outsiders in the

lands of Islam: Mamluks, Mongols and eunuchs (London, 1980), Item III). For the possibility
that some eunuchs were actually born Muslims see David Ayalon, 'The Mamluk novice,
on his youthfulness and his original religion', Revue des Etudes Islamiques, 54 (1986), esp.
p. 6 (repr. in Islam and tfie abode of war, Item V).

31 For this process see especially Speros Vryonis, Jr. , The decline of medieval Hellenism in Asia
Minor and the process oflslamizationfrom the eleventh through the fifteenth century (Berkeley,
Los Angeles and London, 1971); also V. L. Menage, 'The Islamization of Anatolia', in
Levtzion (ed.), Conversion.

32 For an exhaustive study of one conversion narrative, that of the khan Ozbek, and its
echoes through six centuries, see Devin DeWeese, Islamization and native religion in the
Golden Horde: Baba Tukles and conversion to Islam in historical and epic tradition (University
Park, PA, 1994).

198

Conversion and the ahl al dhimma

have represented an inconvenience to Tamerlane (Trmur Lang, r. 771 807/
1370 1405) a generation later as he built his own legitimising ideology. 33

We know still too little about the conversion of the Mongols, but it seems clear that the rulers and the ruling elite converted separately from the masses
of the tribesmen. Sufis, especially extremist ones, such as howling dervishes,
are believed to have played a role in attracting many of the tribesmen to Islam,

but it has recently been shown both that the reason that used to be assumed
for their success their similarity to the shamans of Mongol tradition is
mistaken and that such Sufis played little or no role in the conversion of the
rulers. 34 These latter were influenced by Sufis, but the Sufis in question were
of much more moderate bent, and probably enjoyed the favour of the
Muslims in the royal administrative and bureaucratic elite. Nonetheless,
the conversion of the rulers may have been motivated by the need to follow
their subjects, who were converting ahead of them. One recent study suggests
that most of the Mongol soldiers in Persia had probably converted by 694/
1295, when Ghazan Khan converted in order to secure their loyalty. According
to this view the conversion of Tegiider a decade earlier had been too early for
the Mongol elite, still pagan, and he was deposed and executed as a result. 35

What came after

Conversion to the faith of Islam has many motives, and it is usually hazardous
to assign any individual or group acceptance of Islam exclusively to one
motive. Those who converted may not themselves have had too clear an
understanding of why they were doing it, or even of what they were doing.
That included not only a change of religious label, but also a gradual and

33 For these legends see Istvan Vasary, '"History and legend" in Berke Khan's conversion
to Islam', in D. Sinor (ed.), Aspects of Altaic civilization, III: Proceedings of the thirtieth
meeting of the permanent International Altaistic Conference, Bloomington, ig8y, Uralic and
Altaic series 145 (Bloomington, 1990); Michal Biran, 'The Chaghadaids and Islam: The
conversion of Tarmashirin Khan (1331 34)', JAOS, 122 (2002).

34 See, e.g., Reuven Amitai Preiss, 'Sufis and shamans: Some remarks on the Islamization

of the Mongols in the Ilkhanate', JESHO, 42 (1999); Reuven Amitai Preiss, 'Ghazan,
Islam and Mongol tradition: A view from the Mamluk sultanate', BSOAS, 59 (1996); also
Jean Richard, 'La conversion de Berke et les debuts de l'islamisation de la Horde d'Or',
Revue des Etudes Islamiques, 35 (1967).

35 Angus Stewart, 'The assassination of king Het'um II: the conversion of the Ilkhans and
the Armenians', JRAS (2005) (who stresses that we should not see the struggle between
Armenia and its Muslim neighbours in simplistic terms of Christian versus Muslim, even
or especially at this early stage of the Mongols' conversion); Charles Melville, 'Padshah i
Islam: The conversion of Sultan Mahmud Ghazan Khan', Pembroke Papers, 1 (1990);
Reuven Amitai, 'The conversion of Tegiider Ilkhan to Islam', JSAI, 25 (2001).

199

The New Cambridge History of Islam

comprehensive reordering of much in the individual's life and in the collective
social environment. In Africa what Pouwels labels a 'reorientation' of religious
belief and practice in the direction of Islam may have amounted to little more
than an adjustment of daily life incorporating new, Islamic practices and, eventually but not universally, the phasing out of the old. In India and South
East Asia 'creeping orthopraxy' is something similar writ large. The immense
variety of Islam oroflslams in the world are a product of the encounter of
different Muslims and their versions of Islam at different times and under very
varied circumstances with the immense variety of local contexts. Something in

the processes, or the methods, has changed in the modern period, with the
universal reach of modern technologies, but the pilgrimage to Mecca in earlier
times, if slower, was nevertheless an efficient channel for the diffusion of Islamic
norms. Today the growth of Islam continues apace, in Europe and the
Americas, in Asia and in Africa. Recent projections suggest that France may
have a Muslim majority by the middle of this century, and the Ivory Coast went
from under 10 per cent Muslim at the time of independence from France in i960
to well over 70 per cent Muslim within a generation.

Free will or compulsion

One feature that has characterised the preaching of Islam and conversion to
that faith over the last fourteen centuries is the general absence, other than in
the cases of conversion of an entire state or group for political reasons, of
compulsion. Justified by a sentence in the Qur'an (Q 2:256), 'there is no
compulsion in religion' (id ikraha fi al din), the prohibition thus implied has
been largely honoured. Exceptions have been few and scattered: Jews and
Christians under the mad Fatimid caliph al Hakim in Egypt in the early fifth/
eleventh century (they were allowed to return to their original faiths following
his death); Jews and Christians under the Almohads in al Andalus and North
Africa in the sixth/twelfth century (the effect was to reduce these commun
ities to near disappearance); Jews in Istanbul as a result of the activity of
Shabbetai Sevi (the descendants of these converts formed a separate sub sect,
the Donme, surviving to this day); Jews in Yemen on several occasions,
notably in the eleventh/seventeenth century following the appearance of a
false messiah (they were later permitted to resume their Judaism); 36 Jews in

36 See P. S. van Koningsveld, J. Sadan and Q. al Samarrai, Yemenite authorities and Jewish
messianism: Ahmad ibn Nasir al Zaydi's account of the Sabbathian movement in seventeenth
century Yemen and its aftermath (Leiden, 1990).

Conversion and the ahl al dhimma

Mashhad in Iran in the thirteenth/nineteenth century (these Jews maintained
a Marrano style existence, intermarrying only among themselves, until the
middle of the twentieth century, when they managed to leave the country and
return to Judaism). Other cases include the forcible Islamisation of dhitnmi
boys taken away from their families by the Ottomans under the devsirme
system and impressed into the military, much as the Mamluks, slave soldiers
imported into the Middle East between the seventh/thirteenth and twelfth/
eighteenth centuries, were Islamised as part of their education as soldiers and
often as a ruling class there. Anatolia, during the period when the Ottomans
and others were taking it over from the Byzantines, offers a further model of
forcible Islamisation, this time much more in tune with popular images. Here
we find examples of Greeks and Armenians being offered the choice between
Islam and the sword, with many choosing the former. 37

What stands out in these accounts is not just that occasionally the forced
converts were allowed to return to their original faiths though Islamic legal
schools offer contrasting views on the permissibility of this but rather the
overall attitude to compulsion, especially by comparison with Christianity. In
general, and with some notable exceptions, Islamic societies have exhibited a
surprising degree of indifference to the existence of Jewish and Christian
minorities in their midst. If they have not encouraged them and indeed,

have by their actions and attitudes sought rather to wear them down they have virtually never sought to extirpate these faiths or to compel their followers to go over to Islam.

The ahl al-dhimma

Definitions

Not everyone converted to Islam. Especially in the former Christian ruled areas, where Arabic and, later, Turkish came to dominate, communities of
Jews and Christians remained. 38 Their survival reflects not so much tolerance
(an anachronistic concept for classical and medieval Islam) as Qur'anic recog
nition that, though degraded forms of religious truth, both Judaism and

37 See Vryonis, Decline, pp. 177 8, 240 2; see also Cemal Kafadar, Between two worlds: The
construction of the Ottoman state (Berkeley, 1995); Selim Deringil, '"There is no compul
sion in religion": On conversion and apostasy in the late Ottoman empire: 1839 1856',
Comparative Studies in Society and History, 42 (2000).

38 For the argument that few Jews converted, while most Christians did, see David
J. Wasserstein, 'Islamisation and the conversion of the Jews', in Garcia Arenal,
Conversions islamiques.

Christianity were true religions. Possessed of holy texts (though their contents
were no longer necessarily all authentic or properly preserved), Jews and Christians were ahl al kitab, People(s) of the Book, and, as such, ahl al dhimma,

people with a contract of protection under the rule of Islam. 39 By the same
token, others polytheists and idolaters enjoyed no such protection, and
must be offered simply Islam or the sword. But reality trumped this theory:
entire populations could not be exterminated, even if they persisted in their
failure to acknowledge the truth of Muhammad and his message. Zoroastrians
were neither Christians nor Jews, and possessed no holy book but in the
reality of the Islamic conquests they were soon identified with the otherwise
obscure Majus mentioned in the Qur'an, and by the third/ninth century this
faith without one had patched together a set of scriptures from pre Islamic
Zoroastrian religious writings to make them people of a book too. India
offered a greater difficulty. Islamic conquests in the subcontinent as early as
the second/eighth century brought vast numbers of Hindus under Islamic
rule. Zoroastrians could somehow be found a place under the umbrella of
monotheism, but there was not enough space there for the glorious richness
of the Hindu pantheon. Reality again, however, in the form of the vast size of
the Hindu subject population, pointed the way to a solution, and Hindus were
recognised as ahl al dhimma (though not as ahl al kitab) from an early date. 4 °

Legal status

Christians and Jews enjoyed definite and clear legal status under Islamic rule.
They were governed by a complex of rules derived from the Qur'an and from a
document known as the Pact of TJmar QahA ^Umaf), with much variation
according to time and place. The Pact of 'Umar itself is associated with the caliph
'Umar I (r. 13 23/634 44), but it is probably rather less old, and a link with 'Umar II
(r. 99 101/718 20) seems more likely. 41 It lays down, in the form of a letter
addressed to c Umar by the Christian inhabitants of an unnamed place in Syria,
how they are to behave, and what their rights and obligations are. The document
appears first only hundreds of years after the conquests, but its contents offer the

39 For the arguments about the texts see Hava Lazarus Yafeh, Intertwined worlds: Medieval
Islam and Bible criticism (Princeton, 1992); Camilla Adang, Muslim writers on Judaism and
tfte Hebrew Bible from Ibn Rabban to Ibn Hazm (Leiden, 1996).

40 Yohanan Friedmann, Tolerance and coercion in Islam: Interfaith relations in the Muslim
tradition (Cambridge, 2003), p. 85.

41 See Mark R. Cohen, 'What was the Pact of 'Umar? A literary historical study', JSAI, 23
(1999); Albrecht Noth, Abgrenzungsprobleme zwischen Muslimen und Nicht
Muslimen: Die "Bedingungen 'Umars (as surut al 'umariyya)" unter einem anderen
Aspekt gelesen', JSAI, 9 (1987).

Conversion and the ahl al dhimma

paradigm for dhimmi status over the whole of the Islamic world before the
modern period. In particular, it establishes the dhimmi communities as distinct
corporations within the Islamic umma, with the communities having responsi
bility for their members' actions, and standing to lose those rights if they
misbehave or go beyond what Islamic law and society allowed them.

Rooted as it was in the Qur] an and related documents, the dhimma offered
Christians and Jews security in return for loyalty, and broad religious freedom
in return for acceptance of second class status. They were liable for a poll tax,
the jizya; could not make too public practice of their faiths; could not, in theory
at least, build new or very high houses of worship; their testimony in court was
not worth as much as that of a Muslim. Occasionally they were forced to wear

distinctive clothing or even marks on their dress, and were, again in theory,
supposed not to occupy posts that gave them authority over Muslims.

The aim of the restrictions contained in the Pact of TJmar is far from clear.
Was it to force second class status on non Muslims and provide through the
jizya an additional source of income for the state? Was it to enforce separation
of non Muslims from Muslims? Was it, through the burdens it imposed, to encourage conversion? At different times each of these arguments has appeared persuasive to scholarship, but if the Pact of 'Umar is early then certain of its provisions, in particular the undertaking not to teach dhimmi children the Qur'an or to use Arab names, wear the appearance of attempts simply to maintain separation between rulers and ruled.

With time the restrictions were enforced with varying degrees of severity in
different periods and places, and came to be used for all of the aims just mentioned. How the poll tax should be collected offered jurists much oppor
tunity for discussion: while some maintained that it should be collected just
like any other tax, there were those who insisted that it should be collected
directly from the individual dhimmi taxpayer, in such a way as to humiliate
him. The economic weight of the tax varied according to the wealth of the
individual, but it seems rarely to have been so high as to encourage conversion
as a way out of paying it. 42 The jizya was probably the one universally applied
part of the prescriptions of the dhimma.

42 For medieval prescriptions and some medieval and modern examples see Norman
Stillman, The Jews of Arab lands: A history and source book (Philadelphia, 1979), pp. 159 61,
180, 251, 368 9. Aviva Klein Franke, 'Collecting the jizya (poll tax) in the Yemen', in
Tudor Parfitt (ed.), Israel and Ishmael: Studies in Muslim Jewish relations (Richmond,

2000) is a rare study of the collection of the jizya in practice, though it deals with the
modern period. See also above for examples of conversion resulting from economic
distress, possibly related to the jizya.

203

Distinctive clothing was selectively enforced. 43 The caliph al Mutawakkil in
236/850, under popular pressure, tried to enforce the wearing of distinctive signs
by dhimmis. In al Andalus in the fifth/ eleventh and sixth/twelfth centuries special
signs may have been required, and the Almohads in al Andalus and North Africa
in the sixth/twelfth century used the requirement of special clothing for
Christians and Jews as one means to encourage conversion. (It is thought that
the medieval Christian European Jew badge may have its origins in the Almohad
prescriptions.) In Egypt under the Mamluks in 700/1301, and again in 755/1354,
sumptuary laws attempted to force dhimmis to wear special colours, and an Irish
visitor to Cairo in 1323, Simon Semeonis, offers testimony to the wearing of special
colours by the different minorities there. 44 But the nature of such laws is to be
selective, and their repetition shows that they quickly fell into desuetude.

Churches and synagogues existed all over the medieval Islamic world,
encountering occasional hostility from Muslim zealots, being closed and
even destroyed, in riots or by legal means, on the ground that they had not
been in existence at the birth of Islam, but they were generally rebuilt very
soon. 45 Most importantly, the Islamic empire could not have survived at the

start without dhimmi administrators, and for many centuries even Egypt was
run by Coptic civil servants. Jews and Christians served Muslim rulers as
viziers, as advisers and as doctors from al Andalus in the west eastwards to
Iran and if several came to bad ends because of their dhimmi identity, Muslim
viziers, whether Muslim born or converts, do not seem to have had much
greater success in avoiding such fates. 46

Boundaries

Islamic law defined some of the boundaries of dhimmi life: dhimmis could
convert to Islam, occasionally to each other's faiths, but Muslims might not
apostatise to Christianity or Judaism, under pain of death. 47 Dhimmi men were

43 For the distinctive signs see Stillman, Jews, p. 167 (from al Tabari); I. Lichtenstadter, 'The
distinctive dress of non Muslims in Islamic countries', Historia Judaica, 5, 1 (1943).

44 Simon Semeonis, Itinerarium Symonis Semeonis ah Hybernia ad Terram Sanctum, ed. Mario
Esposito, Scriptores Latini Hiberniae 4 (Dublin, i960), pp. 58 9, sec. 34; in the same
section Simon reports what may have been an episode of forced conversion.

45 Seth Ward, 'Ibn al Rifa'a on the churches and synagogues of Cairo', Medieval Encounters,
5 (1999).

46 See, e.g., for doctors, Doris Behrens Abouseif, Faih Allah and Abu Zakariyya: Physicians under
the Mamluks (Cairo, 1987); and more generally Bernard Lewis, 'An ode against the Jews', in
Bernard Lewis, Islam in history: Ideas, men and events in the Middle East (London, 1973).

47 The regulations, with the variations in the attitudes of the different legal schools, are
conveniently assembled in Antoine Fattal, Le statut legal des non musulmans en fays
d'Islam (Beirut, 1958); also S. A. Rahman, Punishment of apostasy in Islam, 2nd edn
(Lahore, 1978).

Conversion and the ahl al dhimma

forbidden to marry Muslim women, but Muslim men were permitted to
marry dhimmi women, any offspring being Muslim. Conversion was thus
a
one way street (we hear occasionally of people uttering the formula of
conversion in the heat of family arguments and the like, and being unable
to undo the change thus made 48), while interreligious marriage served
like
wise to increase the proportion of Muslims in the population.

Other boundaries were constructed by the dhimmis themselves. Beyond
religion as a marker of communal ascription, Christians and Jews with
varying success used language and script, combined with culture, in
ways
that marked them off from their neighbours. While they too went over to
Arabic or New Persian, in the case of Arabic they created communally
identifiable forms of that language, and in the Persian case Jews used the
Hebrew script to write the language (preserving in the manuscripts
valuable
evidence of early stages of New Persian). 49 For Christians, linguistic
adapta
tion was often a first step towards Islamisation and, in the Arab world,
Arabisation (we cannot know, in fact, much about the relative chronology
of these processes on a large scale). For Jews too, though much more
slowly, linguistic acculturation was a step in the direction of fuller assim
ilation, but it never created beyond some starry eyed secularists in the
modern period the notion of a Jewish Arab to parallel that of Christian
Arab which had existed since before Islam.

Dhimmis enjoyed communal autonomy and generally governed
themselves
by their own laws, but they were not cut off from the broader society. 50
As we
have seen, dhimmis could serve government though tenure was never
very
secure. More importandy, they were not confined to any particular
occupa

tions: other than activities such as the law and the military, the dhimmi was as
free as the Muslim to take up any profession or trade. The Cairo Geniza offers
numerous cases of dhimmis and Muslims engaging together in business or in

48 For a probable example of this see David Wasserstein, ' Kfatwa on conversion in Islamic
Spain', Studies in Muslim Jewish Relations, 1 (1993); a modern case is described in Nissim
Rejwan, The Last Jews in Baghdad: Rememhering a lost homeland (Austin, 2004), p. 10.

49 Geoffrey Khan, 'Judaeo Arabic and Judaeo Persian', in Martin Goodman (ed.),
The Oxford handbook of Jewish studies (Oxford, 2002); David J. Wasserstein, 'The
language situation in al Andalus', in A. Jones and R. Hitchcock (eds.), Studies on the
Muwassah and the Kharja (Reading, 1991) (repr. in M. Fierro and J. Samso (eds.),
The formation of al Andalus, part 2: Language, religion, culture and tfie sciences (Aldershot,
1998), pp. 3 17); David J. Wasserstein, 'Langues et frontieres entre juifs et musulmans en
al Andalus', in Maribel Fierro (ed.), Judios y musulmanes en al Andalus y el Magreb:
Contactos intelectuales (Madrid, 2002).

50 See Mark R. Cohen, Jewish self government in medieval Egypt: The origins of the office of head
of the Jews, ca. 1065 1126 (Princeton, 1980).

205

The New Cambridge History of Islam

different trades. 51 Dhimmi physicians treated both dhimmi and Muslim patients,
though occasionally Muslims spoke out against the potential danger of a dhimmi doctor killing his Muslim patients. One anecdote in an anti dhimmi
treatise of the eighth/fourteenth century has Maimonides warning his patron
the Qadi al Fadil, 'Let me advise you not to receive any medical treatment
from a Jew, because with us, whoever desecrates the Sabbath his blood is licit for us,' with the result that the qadi banned Jews from practising as doctors. 52

Cultural life

The degree of security and of religious freedom enjoyed by Christians and
Jews varied, reflecting external circumstance, but there was enough to make
possible, for the Jews, a remarkable cultural renaissance under Arab Islam.
The conquests of Islam brought most of the Jews in the world under one rule;
they gave the Jews greatly improved status second class status, it is true, but
that was far better than what they had had before, especially under Christian
rule; the adoption, apparently quite rapid, of ajewish form of Arabic, written
in Hebrew letters, gave them a common language everywhere, while it also
opened up for them a window onto the fast developing Arabic language culture of their neighbours. By the beginning of the fourth/ tenth century Arabic had penetrated sufficiently to make an Arabic translation of the scriptures a necessity. It was made by the polymathic and productive Sa'adya Gaon (880 942), born in Egypt but active especially in Bagdad. 53

Depending on the new culture of the Muslims, using a common language with them and acquainted with their literature and cultural concerns, Jews
under Islam took their literary genres and forms, many of their subjects, their
poetical forms and metres, the very pattern of their linguistic behaviour, from
those of Arabic. 54 The result was in effect a subset of Islamic Arabic culture
(the only significant genre that is absent from Jewish writing on Arabic models

is historiography, for reasons having to do with Jewish history itself). The

51 S. D. Goitein, A Mediterranean society: The Jewish communities of the Arab world as portrayed
in the documents of the Cairo Geniza, 6 vols. (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1967 93), esp. vol. I,
passim; A. L. Udovitch, Partnership and profit in medieval Islam (Princeton, 1970).

52 The anecdote is found in al Wasitf s Radd 'aid ahl al dhimma, trans by Richard Gottheil in
JAOS, 41 (1921), pp. 396 7, quoted in Stillman, Jews, p. 276.

53 For Sa'adya see still Henry Maker, Saadia Gaon, his life and works (Philadelphia, 1942); for
the broader situation now Robert Brody, The geonim of Babylonia and tfte shaping of
medieval Jewish culture (New Haven, 1998).

54 Rina Drory, Models and contacts: Arabic literature and its impact on medieval Jewish culture
(Leiden, 2000).

206

Conversion and the ahl al dhimma

great centres of Jewish cultural life under Islamic rule were in what became
the Arab world Baghdad, Cairo, Qayrawan, al Andalus, Morocco, Yemen
and their rise and fall tended to approximate to the rise and fall of these centres
of Islamic Arabic cultural life. 55 The greatest of these centres was in al Andalus,
between the fourth/tenth and sixth/twelfth centuries, and was brought to an
end by the persecutions of the Almohads, which are said to have destroyed

many of the Jewish communities both in al Andalus and in Morocco, convert
ing many to Islam and sending others into exile. 5

Among these exiles was Moses Maimonides, the most fertile and significant
of Jewish minds in the Middle Ages. Born in Cordoba, he spent some time in
Morocco before making his home in Egypt, where he worked as a doctor at
the court of Saladin and became leader of the Jewish community in that
country. 57 Several generations of his descendants inherited his mantle, but
Egypt never attained the significance in Jewish life that it had enjoyed in the
ancient world, and with the decline of the great Arab cultural centres by the
seventh/thirteenth century Jewish culture in the Islamic world went into a
decline too.

Christians and their cultures flourished intermittendy, until the sixth/
twelfth century or so, but the overall trend was downwards: in North Africa
Christianity had more or less disappeared by the sixth/twelfth century, if not
before; 58 in al Andalus but for the reconquista it would probably not have lasted
much longer. 59 Further east, Christianity declined to something like its present
proportions of the populations in Egypt and Syria under the pressures of the
Mamluks and in Iraq under the later c Abbasids. In Egypt and Iraq Christians
are now around 10 per cent of the population, in Israel and the Palestinian

55 For Baghdad see now Brody, Geonim; for Cairo, Goitein, A Mediterranean society; Elinoar
Bareket, Fustat on the Nile: The Jewish elite in medieval Egypt (Leiden, 1999); for Qayrawan,
Menahem Ben Sasson, The emergence of the local Jewish community in the Muslim world:
Qayrawan, 800 w}y, 2nd edn (Jerusalem, 1997) (in Hebrew); for al Andalus, still Eliyahu
Ashtor, The Jews of Moslem Spain, 3 vols. (Philadelphia, 1973 84, repr. in 2 vols., 1992); for

Morocco, H. Z. (J. W.) Hirschberg, A history of the Jews in North Africa, 2 vols. (Leiden,
1974 81); for Yemen, Reuben Ahroni, Yemenite Jewry: Origins, culture and literature
(Bloomington, 1986).

56 The significance of the Almohads in the decline of the Christian and especially the
Jewish communities is debated: see A. S. Halkin, 'On the history of apostasy under the
Almohads', in The Joshua Starr memorial volume: Studies in history and philology, Jewish
Social Studies Publications 5 (New York, 1953) (in Hebrew); David Corcos, 'The attitude
of the Almohads towards the Jews', Zion, 32 (1967), repr. in David Corcos, Studies in the
history of the Jews of Morocco (Jerusalem, 1976), (in Hebrew).

57 See now Herbert Davidson, Moses Maimonides: The man and his works (Oxford, 2005).

58 See Teissier, 'Desaparicion'.

59 David J. Wasserstein, 'The Christians of al Andalus: Some awkward thoughts', Hispania
Sacra, 64, no (2002).

207

territories far lower, about 3 4 per cent. In all these areas the move to Arabic
was early and rapid. ° In Egypt Coptic Christianity took till the sixth/twelfth
century to go over to Arabic and, in that language, even enjoyed a small literary revival in the seventh/ thirteenth century, represented especially by
Ibn al Rahib and several members of the family of Ibn al 'Assal. T But for Christians, more than for Jews, domination by Arab Islam meant in the end

Arabicisation in tongue and Arabisation in ethnic identity, with Islamisation,
or emigration, just a step away.

60 For a revival of Christian culture in Arabic in early Islam see the articles collected in
Sidney Griffith, Arabic Christianity in the monasteries of ninth century Palestine (Aldershot,
1992).

61 For the Banu al 'Assal see A. S. Atiya, 'Ibn al Assal', Eh, vol. Ill, pp. 721 2; for Ibn
al Rahib see A. Y. Sidarus, Ibn al Rahibs Leben und Werh Ein koptisch arabischer
Enzyklopadist des 7./13. Jahrhunderts (Berlin, 1975).

6

Muslim societies and the natural world

RICHARD W. BULLIET

Introduction

There have been as many ways of comprehending the natural world as there
have been human societies. Indeed there have been more, for most societies
nurture divergent and contending views. With respect to societies oriented
towards Islamic belief and practice, it might seem reasonable to begin by
asking how the Qur'an depicts the natural world. But the status of the Qur'an
as the word of God does not mean that Muslim societies have necessarily built

their views of the world around them upon a foundation of divine revelation.

Rather, each society recognising here that the very word 'society' compre hends a multiplicity of individual outlooks has woven a tissue of compre hension from disparate and sometimes incompatible sources, not always giving priority to religious belief.

In attempting to bring a sense of order and chronological development to the great complexity of the subject, this chapter divides into three sections.
The first, 'The pastoral order', deals with the Muslim community prior to 183/800, when it was still primarily Arab in ethnicity. The second, covering the
Middle East, North Africa and Spain during the 'Abbasid caliphate down to
596/1200, is entitled 'The Hellenistic inheritance'. The third deals with regions
at greater remove from the historical Muslim heartland and extends down to
1214/1800. It is entided 'Legacies and syntheses'.

The pastoral order

Disagreement about the origin of the Qur'an will never disappear. Virtually
all Muslims hold the conviction that it contains the word of God as delivered to and through Muhammad between approximately 611 and 10/632. Among non Muslim scholars, an older view accepts this chronology
but sees Muhammad as the book's conscious or unconscious author. This

209

The New Cambridge History of Islam

point of view has led to much discussion of the 'sources' of the Qur'an in Jewish and Christian scriptural or oral tradition. A more recent view, propounded mostly by non Muslim scholars, maintains that the text of the

Qur'an accumulated gradually during the first two centuries of Arab rule
inaugurated by the eighty years of conquest that began around 12/634. This
hypothesis focuses on Iraq as the place where the text achieved its canonical
form in the late second/ eighth century. Corollary to this view is the notion
that the hadith, or sayings of the Prophet, and the sua, or 'biography' of the
Prophet, both of which contain extensive lore about the purported circum
stances under which specific verses were 'revealed', took form at roughly
the same time.

These fundamental differences of opinion are irresolvable given the
current state of evidence; but the first of them, belief in the Qur'an as
God's revealed word, has been the operative reality in the development of
all Muslim societies. Moreover, all three approaches converge on the notion
that the contents of the Qur'an were intended, either by divine will or the
artifice of fiction, to be comprehensible to an Arab society of nomadic tribes
interspersed with clusters of farmers and other settled folk living in western
Arabia in the early seventh century CE. As a consequence, the natural
milieu of second/ eighth century Iraq a land of agriculture, cities, broad
rivers and complex division of labour is little in evidence. Similarly
missing in the portions of the Qur'an that parallel the Bible are the lengthy
biblical narratives describing the rise and fall of the kingdoms of Israel and
Judah, with their implication that kingship is a natural basis for social order,
as well as references to temple rituals, priests and the study and expounding
of religious law. In short, to the extent that Jewish and Christian 'sources'
are thought by some to underlie the Qur'anic text, the text itself contains
little that is inconsistent with life in a remote Arabian locale with no
tradition of kingship or political dependence on the nearby agricultural
societies in Ethiopia, Yemen, Iraq or Palestine. The natural world evoked
in the Qur'an is consistent with the pastoral order of western Arabia, as
verses drawn virtually at random amply testify:

Consider the winds that scatter the dust far and wide,

and those that carry the burden [of heavy clouds],

and those that speed along with gentle ease,

and those that apportion [the gift of life] at [God's] behest! Q 51:1 4

Muslim societies and the natural world

When the sun is shrouded in darkness,

and when the stars lose their light,

and when the mountains are made to vanish,

and when she camels big with young, about to give birth, are left untended,

and when all beasts are gathered together,

and when all human beings are coupled [with their deeds],

and when the girl child that was buried alive is made to ask for what

crime she had been slain,
and when the scrolls [of men's deeds] are unfolded,
and when heaven is laid bare,

and when the blazing fire [of hell] is kindled bright,
and when paradise is brought into view:
[on that Day] every human being will come to know what he has

prepared [for himself]. Q 81:1 14

Art thou not aware that before God prostrate themselves all [things and beings]
that are in the heavens and all that are on earth the sun, and the moon, and the
stars, and the mountains, and the trees, and the beasts? Q 22:18

The term 'pastoral order' as used here denotes a society in which the herding of animals plays a more important role than the growing of crops;

the landscape is typified by natural features such as mountains and trees, as
opposed to croplands, villages or cities; and social organisation focuses on the
individual and the kin group rather than on categories derived from complex
social roles, such as rulers, priests, artisans, traders and farmers. On the other
hand, the term does not imply that every person lives as a nomad in the desert,
or even that most people do; for societies frequently idealise the natural world
in terms of bygone landscapes and lifestyles. Evocations of life on family farms
or in agricultural villages, for example, still convey an ideal of peace and
simplicity for Americans and Europeans whose families left the farm for the
big city several generations ago.

But even if the pastoral order of western Arabia as evoked in the Qur'an was
more an atavistic ideal than a day to day reality in first/seventh century
Mecca, or (more improbably) was Actively recreated in second/ eighth
century Iraq for the purpose of fabricating a foundation myth for an empire
originating in western Arabia, the imagery of the pastoral order conveyed in
hundreds of verses became a constant of later Islamic belief and practice in all
of the lands the faith ultimately spread to. God's creation encompasses angels,
jinn, humans and beasts. The sun and the clouds above, the mountains on the
horizon, the trees that provide occasional verdure, the herds of animals: these

The New Cambridge History of Islam

dominate the natural landscape of the Qur'an. Gardens and streams of running
water are delights of paradise, not the day to day reality of the believer. And

paradise itself will be the reward of the pious when the God who created the
natural world sees fit to bring it to an end.

Reinforcement of this view of nature came by way of the most memorable
non religious cultural phenomenon of the first two Islamic centuries: Arabic
poetry. Though scholars sometimes evince scepticism about the pre Islamic
dates ascribed to some of the poems preserved from the first Islamic centuries,
there is no doubt about the esteem in which those early poets were held, or
about their works becoming models for Arabic poetic composition. Through
them the desert setting and the pastoral way of life abstractly evoked in the
Qur'an gained precision and vivid expression in the most widely memorised
and deeply honoured odes. This extract from a pre Islamic ode (qasxda) by
Imru 1 al Qays is representative:

Early in the morning, while the birds were still nesting, I mounted my steed.
Well bred was he, long bodied, outstripping the wild beasts in speed,
Swift to attack, to flee, to turn, yet firm as a rock swept down by the torrent,
Bay coloured, and so smooth the saddle slips from him, as the rain from a smooth

stone,
Thin but full of life, fire boils within him like the snorting of a boiling kettle:
He continues at full gallop when other horses are dragging their feet in the dust for

weariness.
A boy would be blown from his back, and even the strong rider loses his garments.
Fast is my steed as a top when a child has spun it well.
He has the flanks of a buck, the legs of an ostrich, and the gallop of a wolf.
From behind, his thick tail hides the space between his thighs, and almost sweeps the

ground.
When he stands before the house, his back looks like the huge grinding stone there.

The blood of many leaders of herds is in him, thick as the juice of henna in combed

white hair.
As I rode him we saw a flock of wild sheep, the ewes like maidens in long trailing robes;
They turned for flight, but already he had passed the leaders before they could scatter.
He outran a bull and a cow and killed them both, and they were made ready for

cooking;
Yet he did not even sweat so as to need washing. 2

It may legitimately be questioned whether the Arabs who made up the great preponderance of Muslim society down to the year 183/800 universally

The hanged poems, trans. F. E. Johnson, in Charles F. Home (ed.), Ancient Arabia, Sacred
Books of the East 5 (New York, 1917).

Muslim societies and the natural world

took their cues about the natural world from the Qur'an, particularly during
the early Umayyad period when tribal identities became highly politicised.
But the appeal of Arabic poetry was felt by the pious Arab Muslim, the Christian Arab and the tribesperson who knew little about the Qur'an alike.
It also set the Arabs apart from the scattering of non Arab Muslims who began
to grow numerous in Iraq and Iran after 132/750. Yet daily life in the military
encampments that in some places Basra and Kufa in Iraq, Fustat in Egypt,
Qayrawan in Tunisia had turned into genuine cities by the end of the period
was far from the pastoral ideal. For some, chafing under the density of urban

life, the classic odes generated nostalgia for an idealised nomadic past. Yet for
others, most of all the large numbers of Arabs from the farming villages of
Yemen, life in and around the city spelled opportunity. Thus it would be short
sighted to see the fading of the pastoral order and the rise of a new conception
of the natural world in the third /ninth century solely in terms of non Arabs
coming to outnumber Arabs in the Muslim society. The Arabs themselves
adapted to changed circumstances, acquired new tastes and entertained ques
tions about the nature of the world around them.

The Hellenistic inheritance

'Hellenism' is the term used to designate the culture of intellectual, religious
and political syncretism that emerged around the Mediterranean Sea and in
hinterlands as far inland as Armenia and Iran during the millennium that
preceded the Arab conquests. Deriving from the word Hellene, meaning
Greek, the term overstates the importance of Greek culture per se in the
cultural amalgam; but it correctly identifies the Greek language as the most
important medium of intellectual discourse, even when other languages
prevailed in everyday speech: Aramaic in Syria, Palestine and Iraq; Latin and
Berber in North Africa; Coptic in Egypt; and varieties of Middle Persian in
Iran. The hallmark of Hellenism was an openness to the wide variety of ideas
and religious beliefs found within the vast swath of territory conquered by
Alexander the Great in the fourth century BCE essentially all the lands
between the Nile and the Indus rivers and later extended into western
Europe and North Africa by the Romans, who were deeply imbued with the
new syncretistic world view. Chaldean astronomy from southern Iraq;
Egyptian temple worship; Greek philosophy and drama, as much from Ionia
in what is today western Turkey as from Greece proper; Iranian models of
imperial government; and a variety of monotheistic cults from Palestine, Syria
and Iraq claimed and received attention in the intellectual and spiritual

The New Cambridge History of Islam

marketplace even as more localised traditions, particularly those transmitted
in the dying cuneiform and hieroglyphic writing systems of Iraq and Egypt
respectively, faded away.

Views of the natural world diverged widely during the Hellenistic period,
and only certain of them made their way into Muslim discourses on nature as
religious conversion brought increasing ethnic diversity to Muslim society
from the third/ninth century onward. Astrology, for example, which rested
on the notion that the heavenly macrocosm could provide a trained observer
with a blueprint for the microcosm of a person's individual life, made the
transition despite the absence of firm support in Qur'anic verse. The same was
true of oneiromancy, or interpretation of dreams as indicators for waking life.
However, most other kinds of divination did not. The historical record gives
little indication that Muslims of the third /ninth through sixth /twelfth centu
ries sought knowledge of the future through watching the flight of birds, as
was done in Greece and Rome, or examining water in magical bowls or the
livers of slaughtered animals, as was done in Hellenistic Iraq. Very possibly the
Qur'anic verses that raise suspicions about diviners played a role in bringing
these practices to an end: 'Say: "I seek refuge with the Sustainer of the rising
dawn ... from the evil of those that blow upon knots'" (Q 113:1, 4).

To understand how Islam affected this selective transmission of the

Hellenistic legacy, it is useful to distinguish religious views on the nature of
the divine, and on the connection of divinity with nature, from non religious
teachings. The Qur'an condemned polytheism in no uncertain terms, leaving
little room for the survival of cults such as those of the Iranian god Mithra or
the Egyptian goddess Isis that were popular in the Roman empire. Thus
the religious outlooks that passed across the divide between Hellenism and
Islam were almost entirely predicated on monotheism, making it impossible
to associate natural phenomena such as storms or the sun with specific
gods. Manichaeism was a signal exception. Though it preached a dualistic
interpretation of the natural world as a realm of competition between Good
and Evil, it did manage to survive for some time underground, despite the
imprecations of Muslim preachers who condemned its doctrines.

Non religious materials made their way into Muslim discourse more easily,
but there, too, selectivity was apparent. Greek poetry and drama, for example,
seem not to have appealed to Muslim audiences, possibly because of
too frequent mention of the Olympian gods. More importantly with respect
to the natural world, the Greek tradition of portraying the unclothed human
body with a high degree of realism clashed with the Arab tribal tradition of
wearing form concealing clothing, as well as with the emergence during the

214

Muslim societies and the natural world

Umayyad period of a Muslim aversion to making visual representations of

human beings in general.

However, these gaps in the transmission of Hellenistic approaches to
nature shrink in significance beside the vast corpus of lore that was translated
into Arabic from Greek (often via Syriac), and to a lesser degree Middle
Persian and Sanskrit, during the 'Abbasid period. From Aristotle to Galen, a
cornucopia of systematic observations and experiments dealing with the
natural world became available to Muslim philosophers and physicians who
built upon the corpus of Hellenistic knowledge to advance this legacy further.
Muslim geographers similarly drew upon Persian and Greek ideas in compos
ing their descriptions, and later their cartographic depictions, of the physical
world. Hellenistic astronomical, botanical, zoological and geological lore was
greatly augmented by the observations of Muslims interested in natural
science. And in the industrial realm, Muslim chemists and engineers pio
neered basic processes and devices on the basis of Hellenistic understandings
of materials, mechanics and mathematics. In sum, the Hellenistic inheritance
that 'Abbasid Muslim society received from the preceding cultural traditions
of the lands conquered two centuries earlier by the Arabs was not just
understood, but powerfully advanced by the efforts of Muslim thinkers of
many ethnicities.

Nevertheless, the distinction made here between the religious and non
religious elements of this inheritance belies the fact that religious thinkers in
the non Muslim communities, both before Islam and during the early Islamic
centuries, were more inclined to integrate non religious philosophical and
scientific matter into their religious writings than were most of the Muslim
religious scholars, or 'ulamif, who by the late third/ninth century became
increasingly active in elaborating Islamic theology, law and religious practice.

In each of the Muslim cities that flourished during the third/ninth and
fourth/ tenth centuries thousands of (male) children and adolescents studied
the Qur'an and the hadith, or sayings of Muhammad, as a normal part of their

education and socialisation into Muslim society. But only handfuls studied
astronomy, philosophy or medicine. In similar fashion, proficiency in Arabic
(and from the fourth/tenth century Persian) poetry and belles lettres was a
widely esteemed attainment; but only a few of these litterateurs turned their
attention to the natural world by composing works on geography, zoology
and the like. Moreover, those who did were most likely to write in a literary
vein. The lists of 'wonders' (Ar. 'ajaHb weather anomalies, mutant animals,
urban legends, historical peculiarities etc.) that are so frequendy encountered
in the works of Muslim writers owe more to the Hellenistic style of diverting

215

The New Cambridge History of Islam

the reader the first 'Seven Wonders of the World' list was devised by a Greek
writer from Lebanon in the second century BCE than to Aristotle's practice
of systematic observation.

Thus the Middle Eastern Muslim societies of the third/ninth through sixth/
twelfth centuries inherited a vast amount of lore about the natural world.
Though translation, which was avidly encouraged by the 'Abbasid caliphs of
the third/ninth century, made major texts available in Arabic, the process of
conversion, which progressed quite rapidly in Iran and Iraq during that
century, played an equally important role. Sometimes learned people con
verted to Islam and shared their knowledge with their new community; at
other times converts brought with them an interest in such knowledge and
thus became patrons or readers of learned works.

Economic developments must also be considered. Some regions, most notably Iran, experienced rapid urbanisation accompanied by a boom in trade and manufactures. Growing markets favoured the cultivation of a broad range of new crops, including citrus trees, rice, cotton and sugar cane.
Though not entirely unknown in the pre Islamic period, the rapid spread of
these crops created new landscapes and caused farmers to experiment with
new farming techniques, as evidenced by agricultural manuals written during
this period.

Compared with the preceding pastoral order, therefore, the accommod ation of the Hellenistic inheritance, with the accompanying burgeoning of the
economy, gready multiplied the approaches to the natural world available to
Muslim communities. In 183/800 these communities still constituted, outside
Arabia proper, a minority population in largely non Muslim lands; but by 596/1200 they had become so numerically dominant as to characterise the
culture of the entire Middle East and North Africa. This chronology of conversion reinforces the fact that Islam should not always be considered the sole or dominant perspective from which people viewed the natural world. The various perspectives of the Hellenistic era that selectively and gradually made their way into Muslim discourse were already present within
the non Muslim communities with which Muslims could not help but inter act. Thus it is necessary to guard against the idea that once a text on medicine
or astronomy became translated into Arabic, the ideas contained in the text
became extensions of Islamic thought. There is no denying the great intellec
tual flowering represented by the philosophical and scientific writings of this
period. But it is more credible to see this as the consequence of an unprece
dented bringing together of different peoples in a single religious community
than as something that was intrinsic to the religion of Islam at that time.

Muslim societies and the natural world

Legacies and syntheses

From the fifth /eleventh through the eighth/fourteenth centuries major por
tions of the Hellenistic legacy passed to Christian Europe via translations from
Arabic into Latin. This period of cultural borrowing, which triggered a
profound intellectual revival in Europe, has prompted some historians to
regard philosophers such as al Farabi (d. 338/950), Ibn Sina or Avicenna
(d. 428/1037) and Ibn Rushd or Averroes (d. 594/1198), and scientists such as
al Khwarizmi (d. 235/850) and Ibn al Haytham (d. 431/1040) as key figures in an
'Islamic civilisation'. They further portray the Muslim society of the Middle
East, North Africa and Andalusia between 183/800 and 802/1400 as an incom
parable manifestation of Muslim intellectual creativity. By this light, earlier
and later Muslim societies, as well as Muslim societies in other geographical
areas, appear deficient, and this has led to questions about why Islam 'stag
nated' or 'declined'. Interpreting all of the intellectual achievements of the
period as aspects of the religion of Islam deflects attention from the cultural
affinities that criss crossed the Mediterranean Sea and its hinterlands for
centuries before the appearance of Islam. It also forms a barrier to appreciating
the richness and variety of those Muslim societies that were not involved in
receiving and retransmitting the Hellenistic heritage.

Key to this interpretation is the portrayal of the Arab conquests as
creating an unbridgeable gulf between an 'Islamic civilisation' and a non
Muslim European civilisation variously called 'Christendom' or 'the West'.
Religious difference thereby becomes the single most important factor in
societal relations, despite the fact that the millennium that preceded Islam's
confrontation with Christianity had witnessed the coexistence of myriad

religious communities within an intricately interconnected Hellenistic oil
tural zone. Since Islam, Christianity and Judaism share many elements of
the
same scriptural tradition, the power and endurance of the view that the
rise of
Islam severed the multitudinous cultural links within this zone cannot
credi
bly be ascribed to religious difference. Rather, it arose (and persists to
the
present day) from an assumption of eternal enmity between Christianity
and
Islam stemming from the Arab takeover of the largely Christian lands of
Syria,
Palestine, Egypt and Tunisia.

Looking at the situation in less warlike terms, it can be observed that the
geographical zone in which the Hellenistic culture evolved was bounded
by
the frozen north, the Atlantic Ocean and a series of regions marked by
pastoral
nomadism. These regions stretched from the northern borderlands of the
Sahara desert from the Atlantic to the Red Sea, through the heart of the

The New Cambridge History of Islam

Arabian Peninsula, to the nearly waterless southern reaches of Iran. The
arc of
pastoral lands then turned northward to encompass wide stretches of
Afghanistan before merging into the deserts and steppe lands of Central
Asia. In the Hellenistic period the Greek word 'ecumene', from the root
oikos meaning 'house', denoted the settled and largely agricultural lands
situated within these boundaries. Trans Saharan, Central Asian and
riverine
trade routes the Nile and the rivers of Ukraine and Russia connected the
ecumene with lands beyond this pastoral belt; but travelling merchants
do not
embody a culture in the way that continuous agricultural settlement
does.

As had happened with earlier empires, the rise of the Islamic empire, or caliphate, created new foci for interconnections within the ecumene: first the caliphal capitals of Damascus and Baghdad, and then a series of other major cities from Cordoba in Spain, to Qayrawan in Tunisia, to Cairo in Egypt, to Isfahan, Rayy and Nishapur in Iran. But Islam did not permanently or fundamentally alter the interconnectedness of the region, which was manifested anew with the transmission of the Hellenistic legacy from Muslim lands to Christian Europe.

Islam, of course, expanded far beyond this ecumene, partly through the efforts of traders. From the fourth/tenth century onward it found devotees among both pastoralists and settled peoples in lands far removed from the Hellenistic cultural zone. But for the most part, with the exception of astron omy and the related fields of astrology and calendar making, the Hellenistic legacy did not travel to these new frontiers. The works of Aristotle and Galen were not translated into Chinese or Sanskrit, nor did the Muslim societies of China, India, South East Asia and sub Saharan Africa produce Muslim philos ophers and scientists of the quality of Ibn Sina and Ibn Rushd. Instead, the Muslim communities that took form in these more distant lands went through their own processes of amalgamation with pre existing cultural traditions of different sorts.

The Turkic peoples of Central Asia devised myths of conversion to Islam that often hinged on dreams or images of a sacred tree growing from the body of the ruler. One the one hand, this reflects the practice of revering trees growing from, or near to, the tombs of saintly Muslims; and on the other, it gave an Islamic form to a pre existing world view, often referred to as shamanistic, in which spirits inhabit natural features.

In many areas Sufism, a form of organised mysticism, proved a more important factor in shaping the outlook of the new Muslim communities than formal Islamic learning. In northern India, for example, a tenth/

sixteenth century Sufi poet named Manjhan wrote a long romance that treated
metaphorically the Sufi's love of God. It begins:

Muslim societies and the natural world

God, giver of love, the treasure house of joy

Creator of the two worlds in the one sound Om,

my mind has no light worthy of you,

with which to sing your praise, O Lord!

King of the three worlds and the four ages,

the world glorifies you from beginning to end . . .

Listen now while I tell of the man:

separated from him, the Maker became manifest.

When the Lord took on flesh, he entered creation.

The entire universe is of His Essence.

His radiance shone through all things.

This lamp of creation was named Muhammad!

For him, the Deity fashioned the universe,

and love's trumpet sounded in the triple worlds.

His name is Muhammad, king of three worlds.

He was the inspiration for creation. 3

Here the portrayal of the natural world, and of the role of Muhammad in its
creation, is clearly Hindu in inspiration and incompatible with both the
Qur'anic and the Hellenistic views of the world. Yet the poem served as a
means of accommodating Islam to a pre existing cultural tradition, just as
translations of Greek texts had done seven centuries earlier in Baghdad.

In the Sudan and many other Muslim areas influenced by the culture of sub
Saharan Africa, 'zar cults' preserved a view of the natural world in which an
irresponsible spirit {zar) could take possession of a person, and even induce
illness if a proper ceremony of propitiation was not performed. Women are
the primary participants in zar cult dances and rituals, which are also per
formed in Christian Ethiopia.

Another example of Muslims accommodating pre existing views of nature
comes from the Gayo highlands district of northern Sumatra in Indonesia. There
a ritual specialist known as the Lord of the Fields negotiates with spirits, ancestors
and pests for a good rice harvest. The Lord of the Fields recites 'Qur'anic verses',
which are actually spells in the local Acehnese language that begin with the
Arabic formula 'In the name of God'. In an interview, a Lord of the Fields used
the following myth to explain the spiritual connection between rice and Islam:

The prophet Adam and Eve had a child, Tuan [Lady] Fatima. They lived on
leaves from trees and rarely had enough to eat. Tuan Fatima wanted to marry

3 Manjhan, Madhumalati: An Indian Sufi romance, trans. Aditya Behl and Simon Weightman
(Oxford, 2000), pp. 1, 5.

219

the prophet Muhammad. She talked to him but without touching him, with
out intercourse there was a barrier between them; he had seen her but not
yet married her. But merely from that contact there was a spark between
them, and she became pregnant by him without intercourse. She had a
daughter, Maimunah.

God sent word to Muhammad by way of an angel that he should cut the
child's throat, cut her up into little pieces . . . and scatter the pieces into the
field. The pieces became rice seeds, and grew to become rice plants. 4

This story so diverges from the Qur'an, which explicitly condemns female
infanticide, and so offends Muslim morality in its intimation of incest between
Fatima and Muhammad, that most Muslims find it positively horrifying.
Members of the Gayo community who are well educated in Islam share this
distaste. But it represents a familiar effort to translate pre existing attitudes
towards the natural world into a Muslim frame of reference. The rice plant
had a spirit before Islam became known, and the people who adopted the new
religion wanted to preserve this concept.

Further examples are not needed to make the point that Muslim commun
ities in different parts of the globe have repeatedly dealt with cultural legacies
and their understandings of the natural world by linking them in some way to
Islam. As with the Hellenistic legacy, only certain elements entered into
Muslim discourse; and many of these passed away in time, or are passing
away now, just as the Hellenistic legacy meant less in the twelfth/ eighteenth
century, by which time few 'ulama' interested themselves in the natural
sciences, than it had in the fifth/ eleventh. In addition, it is obvious that new
environments affected local Muslim views of the natural world in more
material ways: different landscapes, building materials, climates, plant and
animal life, and the like. What is striking is the ease with which Islam adapted
to so many cultural traditions.

Conclusion

While there is certainly a Qur'anic view of the natural world that affects all
Muslim societies to some degree, there has not been a general Islamic view
since the end of the second Islamic century (eighth century CE). However,
this historical fact has not deterred thinkers from postulating that such a
general view exists. Persistent rationalist arguments for regarding the philo
sophical and scientific exuberance of the c Abbasid period as normative for

4 John R. Bowen, Muslims through discourse (Princeton, 1993), pp. 202
3.

Muslim societies and the natural world

Islam, when it was actually the product of accommodating the Hellenistic
legacy, effectively marginalise the syntheses of Islamic belief and practice with
non Islamic cultural legacies in other parts of the world. A competing pietistic
view, by which normative Islam is identified strictly with the putative reli
gious practices of Muhammad's own time and place, delegitimises not just the
Asian and African Muslim syntheses, but also the rationalistic interpretations
of the Qur'an and the world that arose from the Hellenistic legacy.

These and other efforts to find a definitive interpretation of the natural
world that is consonant with, or derived from, the data supplied by the Qur'an
and hadlth parallel similar efforts in other religious traditions. In the twentieth
century religious scholars pored over the Bible, the Qur'an, the Rig Veda and
other seminal religious texts to find evidence of atomic theory or astrophysics.
Today other scholars search the same texts for proof that vegetarianism is a

religiously preferred lifestyle. It is in the nature of religious traditions that this
should occur, for people of faith expect their beliefs to be congruent with their
views of the natural world. It is not surprising, therefore, that Muslim societies
in different parts of the world evolved disparate views of nature.

PART II

SOCIETIES, POLITICS
AND ECONOMICS

Legitimacy and political organisation:
caliphs, kings and regimes

SAID AMIR ARJOMAND

Although the Qur'an frequently enjoins obedience to God and His Prophet, in
verses generally recognised as belonging to the period of Medina, and for
mulates a powerful concept, jihad, for the revolutionary struggle against the
Meccan oligarchy to establish Islam, it says nothing about the form of govern
ment under the Prophet or after his death. There is, however, an implicit
model of dynastic rule in the house of the earlier prophets who were also
explicitly designated as kings, most notably the houses of Abraham, David and
'Umran (Moses and Aaron). The fact that no male offspring survived
Muhammad precluded the institutionalisation of that model, which was,
however, espoused by 'All as the leading descendants of Hashim, and after

his assassination by his son al Hasan, seconded by his cousin 'Abd Allah ibn
al 'Abbas. 1

Our oldest historical document, the so called 'Constitution of Medina', did provide a basis for the organisation of authority in the nascent Islamic polity. It
in fact consists of a number of pacts with the Jews of Medina that mark the
foundation of a 'single community' (umma wahida) under God, which was unified in matters of common defence and undivided peace, recognised Muhammad as His Messenger, and invested him with judiciary authority. Nevertheless, as with the Qur'an itself, no provisions were made regarding the
form of government. Muhammad's political activities centred on the organ
isation of jihad. It culminated in the march on Mecca and the defeat of the Arab
confederates of the Meccan oligarchy, which was followed by the voluntary
submission of most of the remaining tribes and the unification of Arabia. Muhammad died shortly afterwards. Immediately after his death Abu Bakr
and 'Umar were clearly apprehensive that the caliphate and prophethood would be reunited in the same family, the Banu Hashim, and blocked All's

i Wilferd Madelung, The succession to Muhammad: A study of the early caliphate (Cambridge,
1996), pp. 3" 13.

225

The New Cambridge History of Islam

succession. The haphazard manner in which they themselves succeeded the
Prophet in turn and were followed by 'Uthman and finally 'All, and the civil
war that began with the murder of 'Uthman and did not end until the murder

of 'All, are ample proof that Muhammad had not settled the issue of succession
before his death. A fortiori, he left no blueprint for the organisation of govern
ment, while his rule had extended beyond Medina to the whole of Arabia, and,
within a decade, over a vast empire of conquest that had come into being with
the defeat of the Byzantine and Persian armies. As a consequence, by the end
of the first civil war in 40/661 the Muslim state looks like a huge army of Arab
tribal contingents, mostly settled in a few garrison cities, with only the most
rudimentary civil bureaucracy.

The establishment of the caliphate and the political organisation of the Arab empire

The term khalifa appears in a number of passages in the Qur'an, and can mean
'successor' or 'deputy', though with considerable ambiguity. As the succession
of Abu Bakr is the most intensely contested issue in Islamic history and its
accounts are heavily doctored, we may dismiss his designation of khalifat rasul
alldh (deputy of the messenger of God) as anachronistic, though the report
that 'Umar was the first caliph to assume the tide of amir al mu'miriin
(commander of the faithful) is quite probable. The Shi'ite doctrine has
preserved 'All's conception of the imam as the khalifat aUah (deputy of
God); there is a coin of 'Umar bearing that expression, which is also amply
attested for 'Uthman and for Mu'awiya, who claimed to continue his rule, and
became the designation of the caliphs of the Umayyad dynasty (41 132/661
750) established by him. 2

By the final phase of the first civil war (35 40/656 61) the dispute over the
legitimacy of the ruler had shaped the conception of Islam as a religion and
separated the Muslim community dominating a vast empire of conquest into

the followers of 'the religion (din) of 'All' and 'the religion of Mu'awiya'. This
lack of differentiation in the authority of God's caliph as the ruler of the Arab
empire gave all subsequent socio political movements a religious, sectarian
character and, conversely, all religio cultural trends a pronounced political
colouring.

Patricia Crone and Martin Hinds, God's caliph: Religious authority in the first centuries of
Islam (Cambridge, 1986), pp. 6 42.

226

Legitimacy and political organisation

A distinct form of authority was, however, taking institutional shape under
the early caliphate with the creation of a new administrative and fiscal
bureaucracy, and a new class of secretaries as carriers of its broader culture.
The first Muslim administrators of the conquered lands notably Ziyad ibn
Abihi, 'All's governor of Fars, who joined Mu'awiya and was recognised as his
half brother became acquainted with the administrative tradition of the
empires, but it took decades for the bureaucratic class that carried out the
fiscal and administrative tasks for the Muslim ruler to appropriate the norma
tive order of universal monarchy by translating Persian works on statecraft
into Arabic. This normative order was binding on both Muslim and non
Muslim subjects of the caliphate. [Abd Allah ibn al Muqaffa', the late Umayyad
bureaucrat who perished in the Abbasid revolutionary power struggle, trans

lated the most important maxims of Persian statecraft in his collections of
aphorisms, and transmitted those of Indian statecraft in his translation of political animal fables, Kalila wa Dimna, from the Pahlavi. The imported Persian literature on statecraft was easily absorbed into the public law of the
caliphate and Muslim monarchies, and shaped the medieval Muslim concep
tion of government. It included the testaments of important Persian kings to
their heirs, most notably that known as the covenant ('ahd) of Ardashir, including an ordinance (ayin) that purported to record the act of foundation
of order: regulation of the hours of the day, domestic life, dietary and sumptuary regulations, and above all the institution of the social order in the form of the four castes. Ardashir's foundation of the social order was sometimes projected back to the mythical king and founding figure, Jamshid,
who, according to one tradition, 'categorized (sannafa) men into four strata
(tabaqat): a stratum of soldiers (muqatila), a stratum of religious scholars (fuqaha 1), a stratum of secretaries (kuttab), artisans (sunna^) and cultivators
(harrathin), and he took a stratum of them as servants (khadam)'. 3

Ibn al Muqaffa''s aphorisms and maxims from the early Persian statecraft literature, especially the covenant of Ardashir, offered a model for what was
lacking in the Qur'an and the Constitution of Medina: a constitution that regulated the relationship between the ruler and his subjects (raHyya), his
viziers and counsellors.

There was no large scale conversion to Islam, except for the prisoners of war who formed the nucleus of a new social class ofmawali (clients) attached
to Arab commanders or Arab tribes. The privileged status of the Arab Muslims

3 Cited in L. Marlow, Hierarchy and egalitarianism in Islamic thought (Cambridge, 1997),
pp. 78 9, apud Tabari.

made the Umayyad polity very much an Arab empire. Except for Syria, where
the Byzantine cities of Damascus and Hims were occupied, the conquering
Muslim armies were settled in new garrison cities (amsaf), notably Kufa and
Basra in Iraq, Fustat in Egypt, Marw in Khurasan and Qayrawan in North
Africa. These became centres of government and administration over exten
sive conquered agrarian hinterlands. Voluntary conversion to Islam was the
slow work either of Muslim Qur] an readers {qurra'), story tellers (qussas) and
later scholars, or of heterodox Islamic movements such as the Kharijites
(Khawarij), while the converts acquired the legal status of the mawali. The
governors and military commanders were all Arabs, the fiscal agents in charge
of the bureau (diwan) that levied the land tax (kharaj), nearly always mawali.

The Islamicisation of political ideas within the Arab empire, and eventually
of the empire itself, owed much to the contested interpretation of Islam by the
rebels and oppositional movements. The Khawarij were the first to challenge
the unconditional legitimacy of the caliph as the deputy of God, arguing that
the caliph would forfeit his legitimacy by wrongdoing, as 'Uthman and 'All
had done, and advocated God's government and the election and deposing of
imams by a radically egalitarian community of believers. The imamate was
thus opened to the non Arab mawali, but no constitutional mechanism was
devised for the deposing of the imam. All other rebellions and social move
ments appealed either to the Book of God and the surma (of the Prophet) or to

the charismatic leadership of a rightly guided {mahdi) imam from the House of
the Prophet, or to both. (On the extreme fringe, the mahdi was to be the apocalyptic riser, qcCim, of the end of time.)

The pattern of controlled conversion first broke down early in the second/eighth century with the Murji'ite movement in Khurasan and Transoxania,
which demanded the equality of Arabs and the mawali on the basis of Islam,
and introduced the element of consent in the election of the imam who was to
be al rida (the agreed upon). Their great rebellion in Khurasan stimulated the
rival mobilisation by the Hashimite movement on behalf of an indeterminate
imam who was 'the agreed upon from the House of the Prophet', as well as its
mahdi and its qffim. With the Abbasid or, more accurately speaking, Hashimite revolution, the Arab empire was transformed into an Islamic polity. As Wellhausen remarked over a century ago, 'the 'Abbasids called their
government the dawla, i.e., the new era. The revolution effected at this time
was indeed prodigious.' 4 The term dawla meant divinely ordained 'turn in

4 Julius Wellhausen, The Arab kingdom and its fall, trans. M. G. Weir (Beirut, 1963 [1902]),
p. 556-

228

Legitimacy and political organisation

power' or 'empire' in the sense of the Book of Daniel, and was soon backed by
astronomical theories that calculated its precise beginning and duration, and

acquired the meaning of 'the state'. The Khurasanian mawali who had brought
the Abbasids to power were thus called abna' al dawla (sons of the state).

The Umayyad empire, militarily exhausted by overextension from
Transoxania and Sind to Andalusia, managed to suppress the rebellion of
Zayd ibn 'Ali in 122/740 and the great Berber rebellion of 122 5/740 3, but
broke down with the crisis of succession that followed the death of the caliph
Hisham in 125/743. It succumbed to the Hashimite revolution on behalf of the
House of the Prophet, leaving it to the 'Abbasids to suppress or neutralise rival
claimants from the Hashimites among the descendants of Abu Talib, al Hasan,
al Husayn and Zayd, as well as the Khawarij, and to inherit the caliphate and
the empire in 132/750. (In the third/ninth century, however, the Zaydis
managed to establish independent imamates in the Yemen and the Caspian
region in northern Iran, as did the Khawarij in North Africa.) The 'Abbasid
revolution inaugurated an era of caliphal absolutism that lasted over a cen
tury. The bureaucracy became more centralised and the army included the
non Arab mawali, especially from Khurasan, on a massive scale, becoming
much less dependent on Arab tribal contingents. The caliph appointed the
judges, and represented Islam by having the Friday sermon delivered in his
name, having his name on coins and continuing the jihad against
Byzantium.

The evolution of the theory of the imamate was the result of prolonged
debate between the 'Abbasids and their Alid rivals, mediated by other trends,
notably hadlth traditionalism and Mu'tazilite rationalism. While his obscure
'Abbasid cousins gained control of the clandestine Hashimite revolutionary
movement and established a new dynasty of caliphs, the scion of the Husaynid
branch of the Alids, Ja'far al Sadiq, was completing his father's organisation
of sundry partisans of Ali (shVat 'Aft) into a sect which became known as

the Imamiyya on account of his formulation of its distinctive core theory of the
imamate. According to that theory the imam was appointed by God, and was
the charismatic leader of the believers and their divinely inspired and infallible
teacher in religion from the descendants of 'Ali, whose succession was valid
upon explicit designation (nass) of the previous imam.

During al Ma'mun's brief reconciliation with the Alids and his appointment
of 'Ali ibn Musa as his successor with the significant title of al Rida (the agreed
upon), the Imami idea of divinely sanctioned legitimacy was partially appro
priated by the 'Abbasid regime, and the legend 'God's caliph' reappeared on the
coins. Although the earliest Mu'tazila had participated in the rebellion of the
Hasanid mahdi of the House of the Prophet, known as the nafs al zakiyya (pure

The New Cambridge History of Islam

soul), in 145/762, considered non Arabs eligible for the imamate and remained
vigorous advocates of a political ethic that made the imam accountable, they
were integrated now into the Abbasid regime as a school of thought under the
same caliph, al Ma'mun, and played a major role in the cultural elaboration of
Islam. As such, they contributed significantly to the development of the idea of
imamate. Aljahiz (d. 255/868), representing the Basran Mu'tazila, for instance,
refuted the Imami and Zaydi theories of the imamate, and put forward his own

rudimentary and syncretic theory that rehabilitated c Uthman alongside legiti
mising the transfer of the imamate to the 'Abbasids. The theory was, however,
barely abstracted from partisan historical reconstruction. It argued for the
election of the imam and, incidentally, allowed for his deposition by 'the elite'
(khawass), but without specifying any constitutional procedure. 5

Hadith traditionalism, the movement led by the pious collectors and schol
ars of the sayings and deeds of the Prophet (hadith) who eventually defined the
Muslim community as Sunni or 'the people of the surma' (ahl al surma) and
equated the latter term with the reliable hadith as the normative foundation of
Islam second to the Qur'an, had been growing throughout the first two
centuries of Islam and began to capture the legal field in the third. In the
third /ninth century, however, the traditionalists did not show the same
hostility to Persian statecraft that they displayed towards Shi'ite sectarianism,
which they branded as divisive and heterodox, or towards the incipient
philosophical movement following the translations of the works of Greek
philosophy and science, which they rejected as foreign. On the contrary, the
absorption of Perso Indian political ideas is evident in the opening chapter on
sovereignty (sultan) in 'Uyun al akhbar by the traditionalist qadi Ibn Qutayba
(d. 276/889f), which reproduced many of the political aphorisms taken from
Ibn al Muqaffa', and the more contemporary Kitab al taj (Book of the crown),
and quotes very extensively from the Persian and Indian books on statecraft
and ethics. One of the key aphorisms was a variant of what was later called 'the
circle of justice': 'There is no sovereignty without men, and no men without
wealth, and no wealth without cultivation, and no cultivation except through
justice and good policy (siyasa).' (Some variants, especially those in Persian
from the fifth/ eleventh century, omitted the word 'good' in order to read
siyasa(t) as punishment in line with the Indo Persian sense of the term.) These
aphorisms were treated as traditions (akhbar) relating to 'the ruler, his exem

plary manner (sua) and his policy'. Ibn Qutayba thus accepted the normative

5 Charles Pellat, 'L'Imamat dans la doctrine de Jahiz', SI, 15 (1961).

6 Ibn Qutayba, 'Uyun al akhbar, ed. Y. 'A. Tawil, 4 vols. (Beirut, 1986), vol. I, pp. 53, 63.

status given to the traditions and exemplary lives of the ancient kings analo
gously to those of the prophets. Under the later impact of the ShafiT and Hanball schools of law the normative sira came to mean the exemplary life of
the Prophet and, alongside the normative surma (tradition), was exclusively
appropriated for the Prophet. But in this period these terms were applied to
the normative sayings and deeds of the ancient kings as well. In fact, the customs and traditions of the ancient kings were given a similar normative
status by the use of identical vocabulary. The tide of Ta'rlkh al rusul wa'l muluk
(History of the prophets and the kings) recording them is attested several times, one of the latest being the great universal history by Abu Ja'far Muhammad ibn Jarlr al Tabari in the early fourth/tenth century.

Furthermore, the conception of the polity in the Persian statecraft literature
remained definitive. The polity was defined in terms of the ruler and his subjects without any meaningful reference to the umma (community of believers), a term which was to become a fundamental point of reference for the religion of Islam, but not for the development of political ethic and
public law. It is rarely used in the literature on ethics and statecraft, which

instead conceived of political community as the subjects of the ruler on the
ancient Mesopotamian model of the flock (raHyya) and its shepherd. When
opening the book on taxation for the commander of the faithful, the caliph
Harun al Rashid, his chief justice Abu Yusuf mentions the word umma once,
but only to equate it with the raHyya. Every other notion comes from the
Persian theory of kingship based on justice. Distinctive Persian institutions,
too, are the subject of legal discussion. These include the intelligence service
and, above all, the ruler's court and keystone of his justice, the mazalim, where
he heard the complaints of the subjects. A generation later, in a covenant of
succession to his own son, Abd Allah, which was widely circulated with the
caliph al Ma'mun's endorsement, the powerful governor of the east, Tahir the
Ambidextrous, bypassing the caliphate, derives the authority to rule from God
directly: 'Know that power belongs to God alone; He bestows it upon whom
He wills, and takes it away from whom He wills . . . Know that you have been
placed in your governorship as a custodian of valuables, a watchman, and a
shepherd; the people in your realm are only called your flock (raHyyatuka)
because you are their shepherd/ 7

The third/ninth century also witnessed the reception of Greek political
science under the c Abbasid caliphate. Abu Yusuf ibn Ishaq al Kind!

7 C. E. Bosworth, 'An early Arabic mirror for princes: Tahir Dhu'l Yaminain's epistle to his
son, Abdallah (206/821)', JNES, 29, 1 (1970), pp. 34, 37 8.

231

(d. 252/866) divided philosophy (hikma or wisdom) into the theoretical and
practical, and the latter into the governance of the soul (ethics), of the
household (economics) and of the city (political science). This division was
accepted, sometimes with slight modification, by Muslim writers of all
persuasions down to the modern period. The promotion of Greek political
science, however, was primarily the work of Abu Nasr al Farabi (d. 339/950),
who considered it the most important branch of philosophy; at one time he
went so far as to take the position that there was no happiness apart from
political /civic happiness. His work is therefore singly the most important
channel of transmission of Greek political science into the Islamic civilisa
tion. Al Farabi used 'civic politics' (al siyasa al madaniyya) synonymously
with 'governance' (tadbif) and 'rulership' (riyasa), and equated the term with
the 'royal craft' (al mihna al mulkiyya), the art (sina'a) of political science. The
goal of political science was the health of the city, as the goal of the medical
craft was bodily heath. The royal craft brought order to the civic community
by establishing a hierarchy among the classes of citizens and their respective
activities.

The Imami Shi'a were considered moderate because they did not insist
on the armed uprising of their imam, and in fact did not expect him to
reappear until the end of time as the qcCim (riser) and the mahdl (the rightly
guided one). It was otherwise with the Isma'ili sect, which began as a
clandestine revolutionary movement in Iraq and the Yemen during the
last quarter of the third /ninth century and was organised on the basis of the
belief that their imam, Muhammad ibn Isma'il, a grandson of Ja'far al Sadiq,
had not died and was the Qa'im Mahdl. The director of the mission, the
Proof (hujjct) of the hidden imam, moved to Syria and sent out missionaries
to the rest of the Muslim world. In 297/909 the missionary who had been
active on the mahdl's behalf in North Africa established the caliphate of Abd

Allah al Mahdl, a descendant of Fatima and 'All. The mahdl as the founder of
the Fatimid dynasty was in due course succeeded by his son, Muhammad,
who took the title al Qa'im. The Fatimid caliph al Mu'izz conquered Cairo
in 359/969, and extended the North African empire to Egypt and Syria for
two more centuries until it was overthrown by Saladin in 566/1171.
Although the majority of the population of their empire remained Sunni,
the Fatimid caliphs established a powerful department of mission, and sent
out missionaries to overthrow the 'Abbasid caliphate and the Saljuq sulta
nate, and systematically developed terrorism in the form of assassination of
major political figures by self sacrificers (fidd'T) as a tool of revolutionary
struggle.

232

Legitimacy and political organisation

Emergence of the sultanate and patrimonial monarchies under the caliphate

Political developments of the second half of the third/ninth and fourth/tenth
centuries are important for understanding the elaboration of the theory of the
two powers that legitimised monarchy as the divinely sanctioned supplement
to prophethood, as well as the later emergence of a juristic theory that
reconciled monarchy with the caliphate, normatively subordinating the
former to the latter. The era of caliphal absolutism in Baghdad ended with
the murder of the caliph al Mutawakkil in 247/861 by Turkish military slaves
(sing, mamluk; ghulani) recruited by his predecessor as palace guards to offset
the power of al Ma'mun's army of Khurasanian mawall. Independent royal

dynasties were established in Iran and Egypt in the latter part of the century,
with the rulers minting their own coins and having the Friday sermon
delivered in their names. The term sultan, a substantive used in the Qur'an
to mean 'authority', and subsequently commonly used to mean 'government',
was applied to a person and acquired the meaning of 'ruler'. The ShTite
Buyids (Buwayhids), who had established an independent dynasty in Iran,
captured Baghdad itself in the mid fourth/tenth century, and effectively ruled
in Iraq alongside the caliph, becoming the first of a series of secular independ
ent rulers to assume the tide of sultan, and ofshahanshah in Iran. They were
also the first monarchs to claim the transfer from the 'Abbasids to their
dynasty of dawla, the divinely ordained turn in power, and used the term
for their dynastic state. This dramatic bifurcation of sovereignty into caliphate
and sultanate was the expression of the autonomy of the political order in the
form of monarchy from the caliphate that had in fact existed for decades. It
roughly coincided with the formative period of Islamic law and the consol
idation of the normative autonomy of the sharVa. This meant that from the
fourth/tenth century onward the constitutional order of the caliphate had two
normatively autonomous components: monarchy and the sharfa. This duality
is reflected in the medieval literature on statecraft and kingship as a theory of
the two powers: prophecy and kingship.

Naslhat al muluk (Advice to kings), an early fourth/tenth century book on
statecraft written in Arabic under the Samanid kings, states that 'God has put
kings as his deputies in his cities and as trustees of his servants and executors of
his commandments among his creatures'. This assertion is backed by the key
Qur'anic justification of kingship alongside prophethood: 'Say God, possessor
of kingship, you give kingship to whomever you will, and take away kingship
from whomever you will' (Q 3:26), the verse used to justify the advent of the

The New Cambridge History of Islam

Buyid dynastic state (dawla), and farther supplemented by a number of other
verses in which God appoints the prophets of Israel as both kings and
prophets. The core idea of the Persian theory of kingship, 'the Sultan is the
Shadow of God on Earth', is reported as a maxim (and not yet a hadith),
supported by other maxims attributed to Ardashir: 'Religion and kingship are
twins, there is no consolidation for the one except through its companion, as
religion is the foundation of kingship, and kingship becomes its guardian.
Kingship needs its foundation, and religion needs its guardians.'

A collection of old aphorisms on statecraft and political ethics in Persian
attributed the saying that the king is the shadow of God to the Sasanian vizier
Buzurgmihr, while affirming that 'kingship (padshahi) ... is the deputyship
(khilafat) of God Most High on Earth. If the kings do not contradict divine
command and the Prophetic prescriptions, and if justice and equity are
exercised in kingship ... its degree will be equal to the rank of prophecy.'9
The same notion was epitomised in the statecraft maxim versified alongside
many others by Firdawsi early in the fifth/ eleventh century: 'Kingship and
prophecy are two jewels on the same ring.' Somewhat later in that century the
Ghaznavid secretary and historian Abu al Fadl Bayhaqi, after a preparatory
discussion of Ardashir as the greatest king and Muhammad as the greatest
prophet, offers a concise statement on what he calls the two powers: 'Know
that God Most High has given one power (quwwat) to the prophets and
another power to the kings; and He has made it incumbent on the people of

the earth to follow these two powers and thus to know God's straight path.' 10

Last but not least we have a clear statement of the theory in the opening paragraph of the second part of another Nasihat al muluk, which was already

attributed to the great al Ghazali in the sixth/twelfth century: 'Know and understand that God Most High chose two categories of mankind, placing them above others: the prophets and the kings (muluk). He sent the prophets

to His creatures to lead them to Him. As for the kings (padshahan), He chose

them to protect men from one another and made the prosperity of human life

dependent on them ... As you hear in the traditions, "the ruler is the shadow

of God on earth.'" The Sasanian maxim 'religion and kingship are twins' is

then confirmed, and the author, dispensing with imamate and caliphate altogether, makes royal charisma (fair i izadx), confirmed by the justice of

8 Pseudo Mawardi, Nasihat al muluk (Baghdad, 1986), pp. 62 3, 108.

9 Tuhfat al muluk (Tehran, 2003), pp. 71, 92.

10 Abu 1 Fadl Bayhaqi, Tarlkh i Bayhaqi, ed. M. Danishpazhuh, 2 vols. (Tehran, 1376/1997),
vol. I, p. 154.

234

Legitimacy and political organisation

the ruler, the independent basis of political authority. Monarchy was, how
ever, necessary for the maintenance of the shaft order.

The autonomous political order thus defined as monarchy had its own

ethico legal sphere. The term used in the translations of the Greek political
science, siyasa(t), came to mean the craft of government or policy, and
generally acquired the sense of statecraft. It comprised both discretionary
rules and maxims of policy and punishment, and the more explicit rules of
administration that had a ceremonial and legal character and were variously
termed ayin (ordinance), adab (manners (of rulership and administration)),
dastur (regulation), marsum (customary norm) and, above all, qanun (regula
tion, law). With these regulations, backed by the political ethics in the
literature of advice to rulers (mirrors for princes), statecraft provided an
independent basis for the normative regulation of government under mon
archy. Government, however, was necessary for the prevalence of divine
guidance and law, and al Ghazali would therefore adduce the maxim 'religion
and kingship are twins' to establish that without statecraft or, to use his
precise words, 'government of the people through monarchy' (siyasat al khalq
bi'lsaltana) though it was not one of the religious sciences, religion would
not be complete. 11

It should be noted that in the Persian literature on statecraft siyasa(t) came
to mean both statecraft and punishment, thus conjoining the two functions of
government and administration of penal law, and as such travelled westward
to Mamluk Egypt and the Ottoman empire, and eastward to the Delhi
sultanate and the Mughal empire. In the Ottoman empire the term was
used almost exclusively with reference to penal codes.

Max Weber applied to medieval Muslim kingdoms his well known ideal
type of patrimonialism as a form of political organisation in which authority is
personal and the administration of the kingdom is an extension of the manage
ment of the household of the ruler, and analysed the use of military slaves
by Muslim patrimonial rulers. 12 Weber's type fits the system of delegated
authority that developed with the appearance of independent monarchies,
even though a variety of political regimes in the Muslim world can be
subsumed under it.

A very early tract on public law in Persian, which should be dated from the
late Samanid period, Adab i saltanat wa wizarat (Rules of kingship and

ii al Ghazali, Ihya' 'ulum al din, 5 vols. (Cairo, n. d. [1965]), vol. I, p. 17.
12 Max Weber, Economy and society, ed. G. Roth and C. Wittich, 2 vols. (Berkeley, 19
vol. II, pp. 1015 20.

235

vizierate), after adducing two fundamental hadith on the political ethic, 'You
are all shepherds, each responsible for his flock' and 'One hour of justice by a
ruler is worth more than seventy years of worship', describes the functions of
the highest officials of the patrimonial monarchy and ranks them in this order:
(i) the vizier; (2) the amir i dad (lord of justice), corresponding to the caliph's
sahib/nazir al mazalim, charged with the administration of justice as the
cornerstone of monarchy; (3) wakil i dar (deputy at the gate); (4) amir i hajib
(lord chamberlain); (5) c arid (army inspector); and (6) sahib i band (postmaster)
in charge of the intelligence service. 13 The Samanids were more successful
than the third/ninth century c Abbasid caliphs in recruiting and controlling
their slave generals and, in his famous treatise on government, Nizam al Mulk
discussed their example at length and drew lessons from it, 14 which he may
have applied in practice in organising his own mamluk corps. Nevertheless,

some of the freed slave generals established their own rule with the disintegra
tion of the Samanid and Saljuq empires, notably Sebiiktegin, who estab
lished the Ghaznavid dynasty and whose son, Sultan Mahmud, conquered
northern India in the early fifth/ eleventh century. The slave generals of
the Ghurids established the Delhi sultanate in the early seventh/thirteenth
century.

Two Iranian philosophers who sought to synthesise Greek political science
and Persian statecraft in this period are of particular interest. Abu '1 Hasan
al 'Amiri al Nishaburi (d. 381/991) diverged from al Farabi to allow for a more
harmonious reconciliation of Islam and philosophy. Al 'Amiri considered
prophecy and kingship the two institutions fundamental for the preservation
of the world, and even sought to reconcile religious jurisprudence and
statecraft based on political science in view of the overlap between the
religious and political spheres. The key to this reconciliation is the idea of
rational religion, rationality being the quality taken to establish the superiority
of Islam over other religions. Al 'Amiri's reading of Islam as rational religion is
analogically extended by his compatriot, 'All ibn Muskuya (Miskawayh)
(d. 421/1030), to the conception of Persian, Indian, Greek and Roman political
ethics and norms of statecraft as the 'eternal wisdom' (jawidan khirad). In line
with his idea of natural, civic religion, Islam is conceived as rational /natural
religion which is therefore universal. Ibn Muskuya, writing towards the end of
the fourth /tenth century, thus relativised the traditions of the Prophet, among

13 Charles Schefer, Chrestomathie persane, 2 vols. (Paris, 1883), vol. I,
pp. 11 13, 19 20.

14 Nizam al Mulk, Siyar almuluk (Siydsatnama), ed. Hubert Dark
(Tehran, 1355/ 1976),
pp. 141 58.

236

Legitimacy and political organisation

which he included the 'shadow of God' maxim as a hadlth, by subsuming them
under 'the Arab wisdom', alongside the Persian, the Indian and the Greek. He
is an exception, however, and other authors continued to privilege the words
of God and His Prophet over the wisdom of the other nations, and thus
remain in line with their colleagues in Islamic jurisprudence.

In the latter part of the sixth/twelfth century Shihab al Din Yahya
al Suhrawardi (d. 587/1191) extended al 'Amiri's theory of the two powers
along Neoplatonic, emanationist lines. The salvational function of the proph
ets is shared by the Persian kings (and he extends the same compliment to the
Greek sages and those of other ancient religions). Calling the light of wisdom
emanating from the Great Luminous Being the kayan khurra, he saw the
ancient kings as possessors of royal authority, saving wisdom and auspicious
fortune. In the FaraHd alsuluk, a book on ethics and statecraft written a
generation later (in 610/1213), we read that the kings should be obeyed like
the prophets because of the 'divine effulgence (farr i izadx) . . . which emanates
from their chest to their countenance and is called in Persian the khurra yi
kayarii V 5 As we shall see, the idea influenced the construction of the Mughal
imperial ideology under Akbar.

Meanwhile, another type of patrimonial regime was developing with the
formation of nomadic Turkic states in the fifth/ eleventh century, namely the
Qarakhanid kingdom in Central Asia and the Saljuq empire in Iran, Iraq, Syria
and Anatolia. According to this conception the kingdom was the patrimonial
property of the whole family of the khan, and was divided into appanages

upon his death. The Turkic conception of kingship as a divine gift to the founder of the state also linked it to the establishment of the law (torii), but as
the Saljuqs adopted the Persian conception of kingship and championed the
Sunrii restoration under the caliphate, the impact of the Turkic conception of
the law had to wait for the Mongol invasion two centuries later. The problem
of succession, however, resulted in the disintegration of the Saljuq nomadic
empire, as it did with the Timurid empire in the ninth/fifteenth century.

In considering the character of medieval Muslim regimes, note should be taken of Marshall Hodgson's rejection of Weber's ideal types of patrimo
nialism and sultanism (which was defined too narrowly to capture illegitimate
domination of the Turkish guards of the caliphs). In their place Hodgson offers
two ideal types of his own: 'the a l ycm amir system' in the Saljuq period; and
'the military patronage state' of the post Mongol era. The first describes the
regime that emerged with the development of the iqta c system of land tenure

15 FaraHd al suliik, ed. N. Wisall and G. Afrasiyabi (Tehran, 1368/ 1989), pp. 49 50.

237

The New Cambridge History of Islam

and in which the social power of the notables (a'yan) in towns and villages
was subordinated to the domination of the military elite (amirs) commanding
the garrisons. It was characterised by a considerable degree of social and geographical 'cosmopolitan' mobility assured by the sb.arVa. According to

Hodgson the system represented a stalemate between agrarian and mercantile
power. With the weakening of bureaucracy and the decentralisation of land
assignments that resulted from the increase in the size of the iqtti c and
amalgamation of fiscal revenue collection and prebendal grants for military
and administrative service, the system developed in a military direction. 1 In
fact, in interaction with the above mentioned absence of primogeniture and
indivisibility in nomadic kingdoms, the power of women in Turkic royal
families created a novel political regime. The appanage of a young Saljuq
prince was in practice governed by his tutor (atabeg/ atabak) whom his
widowed mother tended to marry. The regime of the atabegs of Fars survived
the collapse of the Saljuq empire and the Mongol invasion, but most atabeg
domains disintegrated towards the end of the seventh /twelfth century, with
some cases of seizure of power by Saljuq mamluks. The a L yan amir system thus
changed into an extremely decentralised system in the latter part of the sixth/
twelfth and early seventh/thirteenth centuries.

Meanwhile, a very different pattern had developed in Andalusia, where an
Umayyad caliphate had been established after the Abbasid revolution and by
the fifth/ eleventh century disintegrated into a system ofmuluk al tawa'if(reyes
de taifas or ta'ifa kingdoms) which Ibn Rushd (Averroes) had explained in
terms of the typology of regimes taken from Greek political science.
His approach was developed by another thinker from the Maghrib, Abd al
Rahman ibn Khaldun (d. 808/1406), who put forward an original typology of
government based on the generation of Muslim historical experience in the
epochal Muqaddima (Introduction) to his universal history, Kitab al Hbar. He
distinguished the caliphate from kingship (mulk), offering an entirely socio
logical explanation of the latter as a natural system of authority based on
group solidarity ('asabiyya). He then theorised the historical experience of
the rise of the Fatimids and of the Almoravid and Almohad dynasties in
the fifth/ eleventh and sixth/twelfth centuries in the Maghrib within the

framework of the cycle of rise and fall of tribal dynasties. Each cycle began
as a revolution carried out by a tribal confederation whose group solidarity
was decisively reinforced by religion under the leadership of religious

16 Marshall G. S. Hodgson, The venture of Islam, 3 vols. (Chicago, 1974), vol. II, pp. 64 74,
93 4-

Legitimacy and political organisation

reformers. Be that as it may, the subsequent dynasties in the Maghrib retained
the designations of caliph and commander of the faithful as a heritage of these
religious revolutions, and the king of Morocco is considered the commander
of the faithful to this day.

Attempts had been made even before the Buyid sultanate to create a
tradition of administration under the vizierate of the 'Abbasid caliphate,
notably in Kitab al wuzara' wa'l kuttab (Book of viziers and secretaries) by
Muhammad ibn c Abdus al Jahshiyari (d. 331/942). The great vizier of the Saljuq
sultans, Nizam al Mulk Tusi, who built his famous Nizamiyya colleges to
promote Islamic learning and is therefore considered the chief architect of 'the
Sunni restoration', personally took an important step to integrate the tradition
of vizierate into the dual theory of power. In his classic book on statecraft,
Siyar al muluk (Ways of kings) or Siyasatnama (Book of statecraft), Nizam al
Mulk, after discussing the legitimacy of monarchy and the principles of its

government and political organisation, proceeded to legitimise the authority
of the vizier as well, adducing traditions of both the kings and the prophets:
'Every king who has attained greatness . . . has had good viziers, as have had
the great prophets.' Great kings such as Khusrau I, Anushrrwan and the
Ghaznavid sultan Mahmud appointed great viziers and 'the sunnat [custom
or tradition] of the prophets and the sua [manner, way] of the kings have thus
become well known tales'. 17 Nizam al Mulk's project of creating an admin
istrative tradition of the secretaries alongside the legal tradition of the i ulama'
gave birth to a new genre in Persian literature: the history of the viziers, modelled on the earlier Arabic books on the traditions of the viziers (akhbar al
wuzara^). In the following century a major concern of the authors who followed his example was the legitimisation of administrative authority in terms of the traditions of the kings, on the one hand, and of the prophet and
his caliphs, on the other. To justify a tradition of vizierate on the basis of the
tradition of kings, one such author equated the turban of the vizier with the
crown to signify the delegation of royal authority to him, and saw it as adorning the head of 'the lord of vizierate and the mufti of the seat of the sharl'at'. The norms of giving gifts to the king, for instance, are said to amount
to 'an approved tradition (sunnat)' with respect to which the viziers have made
'the law of their predecessors (qanun i aslaj) their own regulation (dastur)'.
What is more interesting from our point of view is that Qur'anic verses and
traditions from the Prophet and his Companions are cited very frequently and

17 Nizam al Mulk, Siyar al muluk, p. 234.

239

given normative priority over the maxims of statecraft and poetry. Of some
fifty five verses cited, Q 3:26: 'You give the kingdom to whom you will' occurs
most frequently (four times). Perhaps the most pertinent of the cited traditions
is the saying of the Prophet: 'For him who institutes a good tradition (man
sanna surma hasana), there is a reward, and a reward for whoever acts
according to it.' The goal of this solid traditional backing is, however, to
justify and elaborate an autonomous administrative tradition with whose
foundation he credits Nizam al Mulk. 1

To conclude this section, the core conception of the theory of the two
divinely sanctioned powers was that God had chosen two classes of mankind
above the rest: the prophets to guide mankind to salvation; and the kings to
preserve order as the prerequisite for the pursuit of salvation. This allowed for
the legal pluralism of the Islamic empire. A just ruler made the pursuit of
salvation possible for his subjects through the Islamic sharVa or the Christian
sharVa, or the Jewish shaft a, or those of the Zoroastrians, Sabians and other
honorary 'Peoples of the Book'.

The juristic theory of the caliphate and imamate

The Sunni theory of the caliphate, also termed imamate, was formulated
during the Abbasid Buyid joint rule and in contradistinction to the Imami
theory on almost all its major points. It censored the term 'God's caliph' and
substituted for it 'the deputy of the messenger of God' (khalifat rasul allah),
which highlighted the post Buyid, post sultanic religious character of the
caliph's differentiated authority. The Sunni jurists adopted the Mu'tazilite
position that the imam caliph should be elected, as against the Imami
argument for appointment by designation. The idea of election was sustained

by the legal fiction of the bay'a (oath of allegiance) as an act of investiture
constitutive of a binding contract, ideally concluded by 'the people of loosen
ing and binding' (ahl al hoXl wa'l c aqd) on behalf of the community (j'ama'a), but
for most jurists following al Ghazali also valid even when concluded by a single potentate.

By this time the appropriation of Islamic law by the people of hadlth and their professionalisation into the estate of ^ulamcC (the learned) was far advanced. With this momentous differentiation of religious authority and its
extension over the ethico legal order that was identified as the sharVa (divine

18 Muhammad ibn Muhammad ibn Hasan Isfahan!, Dastur al wizard, ed. R. Anzabi nizhad
(Tehran, 1364/1985), pp. 29, 40, 67, 246 8.

240

Legitimacy and political organisation

path), the jurists of the century old Hanbali and Shafi'i schools of law became
the carriers of a new political theory. To shore up the position against the
Buyid sultans in Iraq and the Fatimids in North Africa, Egypt and Syria, the
Abbasid caliph al Qadir and his son al Qa'im embarked on a policy of defining
Islam and becoming dispensers of Islamic legitimacy to the sultans and kings
who had an independent power base and were already claiming independent
divine sanction for their rule. This meant identifying the caliphate increasingly
with the differentiated religious authority of the l ulama' as officially represen
tative of Islam. The result was the publication of two works with the identical

title of Ahkatn al sultaniyya (Governmental ordinances) and with very similar
content that claimed political ethics and public law as a branch of Islamic jurisprudence distinct from the statecraft literature of the secretaries and from
the more recent political science of the philosophers. This claim, however,
was far from exclusive, and its major proponents, 'All ibn Muhammad al Mawardi (d. 450/1058) and Abu Hamid Muhammad al Ghazali (d. 505/1111) in
the second half of the fifth/ eleventh century, had no hesitation in supplement
ing their Islamic jurisprudence with writing on statecraft and ethical advice
(nasiha[tj) for kings.

It is sociologically misleading to presume that major sectarian differences reflected in various theories of the imamate formulated dialectically in the
latter part of the fourth/ tenth century and throughout the fifth/ eleventh were
a source of different conceptions of government and its legitimacy. Such a
presumption, common in the conventional wisdom and among contemporary
Muslim clerics, would make it impossible to understand the prominence of Imami Shi'ite viziers and jurists in the long century of Abbasid Buyid co dominion in Iraq, or in the last century of the Abbasid caliphate, including
the remarkable attempt by the caliph al Nasir li Din Allah (r. 576 622/ 1180 1225) to revive the caliphate as a real social and political force. The Imamis had been prominent in the government of the 'Abbasid caliphs even
before the Buyid seizure of power.

There is in fact a fundamental similarity between the attitudes of medieval
Sunni and Imami jurists towards political order in relation to the shari'a. The
bifurcation of political authority into caliphate and sultanate after the Buyid
seizure of Baghdad resulted in a distinct mode of justification of political authority in terms of the necessity of maintenance of public order through
the enforcement of the shar7a. This mode of derivation of 'the necessity of the
imamate' is common to the Sunni and Shi'ite jurists of the Buyid period alike;

in both cases, it results in the severing of the link between the necessity of
upholding the Islamic norms and the legitimacy or qualification of the ruler.

The New Cambridge History of Islam

The legal rationale of the respective positions was basically the same, although
the Sunni and the ShTite jurists adduced different traditions and used different
arguments to support it. This identical legal logic consisted in the following:
both groups derived the necessity of imamate from the necessity of the
upholding of the shari'a and observing the Islamic norms.

This similarity is already evident in the fourth/tenth century:

All the 'ulama 1 have agreed unanimously that the Friday prayers, the two
festivals ('ids) . . . warfare against the infidels, the pilgrimage, and the sacrifices
are incumbent upon every amir whether he be upright or an evildoer; that it is
lawful to pay them the land tax ... to pray in the cathedral mosques they build
and to walk on the bridges which they construct. Similarly, buying and selling
and other kinds of trade, agriculture and all crafts, in every period and no
matter under what amir, are lawful in conformity with the Book and the
Surma. The oppression of the oppressor and the tyranny of the tyrant do not
harm a man who preserves his religion and adheres to the Surma of his
prophet ... in the same way that if a man, under a just Imam, makes a sale
contrary to the Book and the Sunna, the justice of his Imam will be of no avail
to him. 19

Thus the Hanbalite Ibn Batta (d. 387/997). His Imami ShTite contemporary,
the Shaykh al Mufid (d. 413/1022), similarly argued in the Irshad that 'it is
impossible for the duty bound believers (mukallafun) to be without an author
ity (sultan) whose presence draws them closer to righteousness and keeps
them away from corruption . . . who would carry out the laws, protect the land
of Islam, and assemble the people to hold the Friday prayer and the two
festivals ('Ids)'. 20 This was offered as the rational proof for the necessity of 'the
existence of an infallible imam in every age', including this one of the 'longer
occultation'!

The major difference between the two positions is that the just imam of the
Shi'a was in occultation. This difference, paradoxically, enhanced the simil
arity of the two attitudes. The logic of al Mufid's position is the same as that of
Ibn Batta: there must be public authority to make the laws of Islam effective.

Writing 'on the necessity of the imamate' in the same vein, the Sunni jurist
[Abd al Qahir al Baghdad! (d. 428/1037) notes the agreement among the
Sunnis, the ShTa and the Mu'tazila that the imamate is compulsory 'and that
it is essential for the Muslims to have an Imam to execute their ordinances,

19 Bernard Lewis (ed. and trans.), Islam from the Prophet Muhammad to the capture of
Constantinople, 2 vols. (New York, 1974), vol. I, p. 171.

20 Muhammad ibn Muhammad ibn Nu'man al Mufid, al Irshad li'l shaykh al Mufid
(Qumm, n.d.), p. 347.

242

enforce legal penalties, direct their armies [and] marry off their widows'. 21 It is
interesting to note that al Baghdad! required ijtihad for the imam, reporting
that the Shfa require infallibility (Hsma). The stipulation of ijtihad was to
maintain a strong link between the imamate and the sharfa. This was just
the link to snap.

In al Ahkam al sultaniyya al Mawardi insisted on this condition, however
unrealistically, to ensure the Islamic legitimacy of the caliph as the imam,
while transmitting this legitimisation to the office holders of the state, the
governors and the qadis, who were duly invested with the authority (wilaya) of
the caliph. But he had to acknowledge the presence of the elephant in the
room, and accommodated monarchy (saltana) under the caliphate as 'emirate
by seizure' iimarat al istiW). The caliph could ex post facto legitimise the
authority of such an amir or sultan on the condition that the latter enforces
the ordinances of the sharfa, if necessary, by accepting knowledgeable repre
sentatives of the caliph. Once more, the justification is in terms of the necessity
of the maintenance of the shar'i order. Perhaps to compensate for this
acknowledgement, however, al Mawardi, who authored a separate book on
'government of kingdom' that conceived of political community as the sub
jects, suggests that the caliph should apply himself to the government (siyasa)
of the umma and defence of the milla (religion). Furthermore, the reigning
caliph could institute a binding contract, called a 'covenant' Qahd) on the
model of ancient kings, investing a successor designate with authority as the
waU al c ahd. It is interesting to note that the conception of public interest
(maslaha 'amma) is introduced in connection with the possibility of consecutive
designation of his successors by the caliph. 22

A generation later the Imam al Haramayn Juwayni, who like Mawardi

subscribed to ShafL'ite jurisprudence and Ash'arite theology, but unlike the
latter dedicated his book Ghiyath al umam (Saving of the nations) to Nizam
al Mulk instead of the Abbasid caliph, argued for the incumbency of the
maintenance of the shar'i order even when the imam was patently incompetent,
as was the case with the Abbasid caliph in his time, and shifted the responsibility
for maintenance of the shafi order entirely to the c ulama' under the aegis of any
effective ruler who could establish peace and order in the realm.

Perhaps the most forceful, and certainly the most famous, Sunni statements
on the necessity of imamate as the source of public authority come to us from

21 Quoted in H. A. R. Gibb, 'Constitutional organization', in M. Khadduri and H.J. Liebesney
(eds.), Law in the Middle East (Washington, DC, 1955), p. 7.

22 E. I.J. Rosenthal, Political thought in Medieval Islam (Cambridge, 1958), pp. 32 7; Hanna
Mikhail, Politics and revelation: Mawardi and after (Edinburgh, 1995), pp. 40 5.

243

Juwaynf s student, al Ghazali, who was a younger protege of Nizam al Mulk.
Al Ghazali was frank enough to admit that the imamate had to be conceded to
a person who lacked not only ijtihad but also many of the other qualifications
required by Islamic jurisprudence. However,

The concessions which we hereby make are not voluntary, but necessity may

render lawful even that which is forbidden. We know that it is forbidden to
eat carrion, but it would be worse to die of hunger. If anyone does not consent
to this, and holds the opinion that the Imamate is dead in our time, because
the necessary qualifications are lacking . . . then we would ask him "Which is
the better part, to declare that the kadis are revoked, that all delegations of
authority (wilayat) are invalid, that marriages cannot be legally contracted,
that all acts of government are everywhere null and void, and thus to allow
that the entire population is living in sin or is it better to recognize that the
Imamate exists in fact, and therefore that transactions and administrative
actions are valid, given the actual circumstances and the necessities of these
times?' 23

To say, in this manner, that the necessity of the imamate was established
was a tortuous and tortured way of saying that there had to be authority and
public order for Muslims to live under the law of God.

The separation of considerations of legitimacy of the imamate from the
observance of the shari'a and validity of legal transactions by Shaykh al Mufid
opened the way for the endorsement of political theory by the Imami Shi'a
alongside the Sunnis, and the ShTite vizier Abu '1 Qasim al Maghrib! (d. 418/1027)
published a concise Kitab fi'l siyasa (Book on government), dividing the
government into three kinds: the ruler's government of his self; his elite
(khassa); and his subjects (raHyya). To ensure that the Shfite participation
would have full legal sanction he commissioned a lecture on 'working with
government' ('atrial ma' al sultan) by his spiritual mentor and the leading
Imami jurist of Baghdad, the Sharif al Murtada (d. 436/1044), who had accep
ted the office of the judge of the mazalim from the caliph, and was a legal
consultant to the Buyid ruler who employed al Mawardi in the same capacity.
Al Murtada was emphatic in justifying the exercise of public authority
(wilaya) to ensure the prevalence of Islamic normative order in the absence

of the imam, irrespective of the qualities and legitimacy of the ruler. Working
for a just ruler was obviously permissible; but al Murtada went much further,
and argued that it was not only permissible but commendable, and under
some circumstances even obligatory, to accept office and exercise public

23 Quoted in Gibb, 'Constitutional organization', pp. 19 20.

244

Legitimacy and political organisation

authority on behalf of a tyrannical ruler. His position was made definitive for
Shfism in the 'canonical' treatise of his student, the Shaykh al Ta] ifa al Tusi
(d. 460/1067), the Nihaya.

The Mu'tazilite doctrine that the imamate was necessary as a divine grace
for the maintenance of the revealed laws was also adopted by the ShPite
theologians of the Buyid period. Their Sunni opponents saw a contradiction
between this doctrine and that of the occultation of the imam. The Shaykh
al Ta'ifa tried to meet the objections of his Sunni opponents, and to establish
occultation on rational grounds from two principles: the incumbency of grace
upon God, which entails the necessity of the imamate; and the necessity of
certainty of the imam's infallibility. This last point is particularly interesting
from our point of view. The sinfulness and fallibility of the actual political
leaders, who are considered imams by the Sunnis, is said to establish, with
certainty, 'that the Infallible Imam is absent and hidden from [men's] views'. 24

The differentiation and mutual articulation of the caliphate and the sultan

ate became clearer in the second half of the sixth/twelfth century. While the religious aspect of the holy offices of the caliphate continued to be emphasised by the Hanbalite Ibn aljawzi, who considered obedience to the
caliph al Mustadi' (r. 566 75/1170 80) an integral part of the faith, the Saljuq
sultans forcefully maintained that the function of the caliph as the imam of
the community of believers (umma) was restricted to the religious sphere.
The caliph's position thus became similar to that of the pope in Western Christendom.

Islamic royalism and the military -patronage state

The juristic mode of reconciliation of monarchy and the ethico legal order based on the sharfa, as the two normative orders of the late 'Abbasid era, survived the overthrow of the caliphate in 556/1258 with only a minor modification prefigured in the Saljuq period. The fundamental distinction between the political order and the shaft order did not disappear but was accommodated within the framework of the post caliphal sultanism in a distinctive type of regime that could be called 'Islamic royalism'. According
to this the ruler {sultan) maintained both the political and the shaft order, and
was therefore the shadow of God on earth and the 'king of Islam'.

24 S. A. Arjomand, The shadow of God and tfte hidden imam: Religion, political organization and
societal change in Shi'ite Iran from the beginning to 1890 (Chicago, 1984), p. 44, apud Kitab
alghayba.

The New Cambridge History of Islam

The locutions padshah i Islam, malik i Islam and sultan i Islam must have been current in the Saljuq era, and al Ghazall used them in his didactic works
and letters addressed to the Saljuq sultan Sanjar. Writing in support of the
kh^arazmshah's serious challenge to the suzerainty of the 'Abbasid caliph in
the latter part of the sixth/twelfth century, the Shafi'ite jurist and philosopher
Fakhr al Din al Razi used the philosophical division of practical philosophy
into ethics, economics and civic politics to offer a synthesis of Perso Indian
statecraft and Greek political science, but only to proceed to establish the total
independence of his royal patron from the caliph. The khwarazmshah, 'the
king of Islam', who led the 'army of Islam' as an instrument of its expansion
among the infidels in Central Asia, was God's immediate deputy. Al Razi maintained that the order of the world is impossible without the existence of
'the king (padshah) who is God's caliph'. 'The king', he further affirmed, 'is the
shadow of God and the deputy of the Prophet.' 25

Meanwhile, the spread of Sufism was also giving a new meaning to the representation of God by the ruler without the mediation of divine law. Thus
in 618/1221 Najm al Din Razi would declare: 'Monarchy (saltanat) is the caliphate and lieutenancy (niyabat) of God; the Prophet said "the ruler is the
shadow of God", which signifies the Caliphate.' He further takes the mon arch's being the shadow and deputy of God to entitle him to spiritual as well as
temporal sovereignty. 2.

The 'Abbasid caliphate was thus made redundant even before its over throw. After its extinction the kings' claim to being God's deputy gained universal acceptance, and the kings added caliph as well as sultan to their titles.
Monarchy was thenceforth derived independently from God. The ruler maintained order in the world; he was therefore God's caliph or representa
tive on earth. The one exception to this new Islamic royalism was the Mamluk
kingdom in Egypt and Syria, where the c Abbasid caliphate, as we shall see, did
have an afterlife.

In their normative hermeneutics, post Mongol books on ethics often alter
nated between the Qur'anic verses and the traditions of the Prophet, on
the one
hand, and the Persian and Greek wisdom and the tradition of kings, on
the
other. The impact of traditionalism after the Sunni restoration by the
Saljuqs
was not confined to Islamic jurisprudence, but also gave prominence to
Qur'anic verses and to hadlth in works on political ethics. This is evident
in

25 Fakhr al Din al Razi, Jami' al 'ulum, ed. M. Malek al Kottb (Bombay,
1905), pp. 62, 204 6.

26 Charles Henri de Fouchecour, Moralia: Les notions morales dans \a
litterature persane du
}e/ge au je/qe siecle (Paris, 1986), p. 430; apud Mirsad al Hbad.

246

Legitimacy and political organisation

the Persian literature on ethics and statecraft that flourished at the
courts of the
later Ghaznavids and the Ghurids who succeeded them, notably in the
preface
to the Persian translation/ adaptation of Kalifo wa Dimna by the
Ghaznavid
official Nasr Allah Munshi. This Perso Islamicate political ethic and
thought
was disseminated by the sultans of Delhi in India in the seventh
/thirteenth
century with such works as the Jawami 1 al hikayat of Sadid al Din
Muhammad
'Awfi and the Adab al barb wa'l shaja'a (The manners of warfare and
bravery) of
Muhammad ibn Mansur Mubarakshah, known as Fakhr i mudabbir, both
of

which were eventually dedicated to Sultan Iltutmish (d. 633/1235 6) of Delhi.

A remarkable feature of this last book is its extensive coverage of military organisation and warfare; there, too, supportive traditions abound, and tradi tional precedents are sought, wherever possible, in the practice of the early prophets, beginning with Adam and the rightly guided caliphs, while other nations and practices are also duly incorporated. This Islamic justification of military organisation can be understood in the light of the continued importance of and legitimisatory function of jihad for the sultanate of Delhi, where the Muslims were a small ruling minority dominating a large Hindu population.

Kingship, according to the official and historian of the Delhi sultanate, Diya 1 al Din Barani, is 'the lieutenancy of the divinity and deputyship [caliphate] of God'. Barani saw the caliphate as a mere phase in the history of kingship. The shafi order was to be maintained by kings who had military power, or their successors. Another point of departure for him was the theory of dual power, but he was much more frank than earlier jurists about admitting the possibility of a serious clash between monarchy and the shafi order. Yes, religion and kingship were united in Muhammad, but this was the Prophet's miracle, impossible for ordinary mortals to achieve. 'Prophecy is the perfection of religiosity, and kingship is the perfection of the world and the two perfections are opposite and contradictory to each other.' That is why Sultan Mahmud, the archetypal 'king of Islam', is made to declare to his children that 'rulership is impossible without practicing the tradition and customs of the Persian kings. And all the 'ulama' of the umma know that the tradition and customs of the Persian rulers are contrary to the Mohammadan traditions and to Mohammad's manner of life.' The central paradox of Islamic royalism is that, in order to protect and promote

Islam, the kings of Islam have to commit what is forbidden by the sacred law. He
repeats twice al Ghazali's famous statement that eating carrion is forbidden by
the sacred law but justifiable under necessity (an allusion to Q 2:173). 27

27 Zia ud Din Barani, Fatawa i jahandan (Rulings on temporal government), ed. A. S. Khan
(Lahore, 1972), pp. 140, 142.

247

The New Cambridge History of Islam

In Iran, meanwhile, the Gulistan of Shaykh Muslih al Din Sa c dl, singly
the most influential medieval book on ethics (incidentally, written in the
year of the overthrow of the Abbasid caliphate), begins with a chapter 'On
the tradition of kings' (dar sirat i padshahan) and similarly combines the
Qur'anic verses and the traditions of the Prophet eclectically with Persian
and Greek wisdom and the tradition of kings, albeit with his distinctive and
exceptional genius for highlighting the paradoxes and moral ambiguities in
statecraft and political ethic. Nasrr al Din al Tusi was more systematic than
most in ranking the scriptural and wisdom sources as the fundamentals
of ethics. His Akhlaq i muhtasharrii (Muhtashamian ethics) is a collection of
Qur'anic verses, traditions and maxims from wisdom literature arranged in
order of priority in each of the forty topical chapters and translated into simple
Persian. Some revealed verses are also integrated into the maxims of wisdom.
This work is also very interesting for demonstrating, as does the reception
of al Tusi's greater classic, that there is absolutely no sectarian difference

between the ShTite and Sunni conceptions of statecraft and political ethic.
The normative hermeneutic is identical in both cases. As an Isma'ili at the
time, al Tusi simply extended the tradition of the Prophet to include those of
c Alid imams and, at the lower level of normativity, the wisdom of the Greeks
and the Persians to include a few directives from the Fatimid caliphs and Isma'ili missionaries.

Statements of Greek practical philosophy in Persian also continued in the era of Turko Mongolian domination. The most important such statement was
NasTr al Din al Tusi's Akhlaq i nasiri (Nasirian ethics), which consists of a free
translation of Ibn Muskuya's Tahdhib al akhlaq (The purification of ethics),
itself an Arabic rendering of Aristotle's Ethics, supplemented by a section on
civic politics. This last section includes some of the writings of al Farabi, as
well as the older aphorisms of Ibn al Muqaffa 1 . It also incorporates the political
ethic of patrimonial kingship under 'royal government' (siyasat i mulk), which
begins with the consideration of the tradition (sirat) of the kings. To establish
the authority of the head of the household, al Tusi produces the much quoted
hadith 'You are all shepherds, each responsible for his flock (raHyyat = subjects).' 2

Al Tusi had many imitators, and his book on ethics was highly influential in
the great Muslim empires of the early modern era. It provided the model for Akhlaq i Jalali (Dawanfs ethics) by the qadi of Fars, Jalal al Din DawanI

28 Nasiral Din Tusi, Akhlaq i Nasiri, ed. M. Minuwi and 'A. R. Haydan (Tehran, 1356/ 1976),
pp. 208, 300.

248

Legitimacy and political organisation

(d. 9o8/i502f.), and Akhlaq i c ald'i ('Ala'iyan ethics) by the Ottoman qadi of
Damascus, 'All Celebi Qinalizada (d. 979/1572). The book itself was used
widely in the Indian colleges, and was regularly read to the Mughal emperor
Akbar. Unlike his contemporary Aristotelian Thomas Aquinas, however,
al Tusi and the Muslim philosophers were unfortunate in that the only work
of Aristotle that was not translated into Arabic was his Politics. They therefore
mistook Plato's Republic as the natural extension of Aristotle's Ethics, with the
consequent loss of many key Aristotelian political concepts that shaped
Western political thought.

The bureaucratic class, secretaries of the chanceries who were the bearers
of the culture of ethics and statecraft, also dealt with the civic society and
institutions of the kingdoms and provided us with a picture of the social
hierarchy and stratification in terms of status by arranging different modes of
address appropriate for different ranks within the civilian population. This
picture could be very detailed, but it basically followed the Sasanian division of
society into 'men of the sword', 'men of the pen' and 'men of affairs', with the
cultivators appearing indirectly and often collectively as 'the subjects' (ra'aya).
This conception of social hierarchy remained deeply rooted, but a dichotomy
of the military elite ^askan) and the subjects (ra'aya), which corresponded to
the division of society into a dominant Turco Mongolian estate and the non
military Persian or Tajik state comprising both the urban strata and the
peasantry, was superimposed on it.

As for the Imami Shi'a, the position of the Buyid doctors was reaffirmed in

the Mongol period. Al Tusi's student, the 'Allama al Hilli (d. 726/1325), stated:

Let it not be said [as our opponents say] that the Imamate is only a divine mercy (hit/) when the Imam manifestly has power so that the benefit of the
Imamate can be had from him . . . For we say that . . . the benefit is there even if
the Imam is concealed, because the possibility of his advent at any time is a
mercy with regard to the believer who is duty bound by the Law. 29

This passage can be read to mean that the divine grace is symbolised by the
hidden imam, the imam in complete occultation, and consists in the revelation
of the law. Thus the doctrine of occultation in effect severs the link between
the imamate as legitimate rule and the necessity of the enforcement of the
shaifa. As we have seen, the Sunni and Imami Shfite jurists alike argued that
the imamate was necessary because there had to be public authority for the

29 Ibn al Mutahhar al Hilli, 'The 'Allama al Hilli on the imamate and ijtihad', ed. and trans.
John Cooper, in S. A. Arjomand (ed.), Authority and political culture in Shi'ism (Albany,
1988), p. 241.

249

The New Cambridge History of Islam

law of God to prevail. If considering the actual ruler as imam could be, as al Ghazali suggested, like eating carrion out of necessity, was it not more convenient to consign the imam to occultation until the end of time?

Upon his conversion to Islam in 694/1295, which was followed by the mass

conversion of his army, the Mongol ruler of Iran, Ghazan Khan, called himself
'the king of Islam', thus adopting Islamic royalism as the type of regime that
was to prevail in the eastern part of the Muslim world. It became polity for the
Turco Mongolian empires from 657/1258 to 906/1500. The Mongol invasion,
however, had also brought in a new, Turkic, notion of public law, which was
gradually absorbed within the framework of Islamic monarchy. The Turkic
notion of divinely granted sovereignty (feut), as attested in the seventh century
Orkhon inscriptions and the fifth/ eleventh century mirror for a Qarakhanid
prince, Kutadgu bilig (Wisdom of royal glory), was inseparably tied to that of
law (torn): a kagan blessed by divine fortune established a state and his law at
the same time. Chinggis Khan thus established the great yasa alongside his
universal empire. The notion of divinely granted sovereignty was reinforced
by the prevalent astrological theories that calculated the turn in power (dawla)
in terms of auspicious conjunctions of planets, and world conquerors, both
Chinggis Khan and Timur assumed their place alongside Alexander as sahib
qiran (lord of (auspicious) conjunction), thus bestowing legitimacy upon the
imperial dynasties they had respectively established. When the Mongol rulers
of Iran adopted Islam, the yasa was assimilated to the qanun and the shar7a
simultaneously. But it gradually ceded its religious character to the shaft a, and
became the law of the state with regard to the Turco Mongolian ruling estate.
Under Timur (d. 807/1405) the yasa, in addition to being the special law of the
Turco Mongolian ruling caste, coexisted in a broader sense with the sharTa, as
the sacred law and the state law. Timur' s son and most important successor,
Shah Rukh, reportedly abolished the Chinggis Khanid regulations, though this

was at any rate reversed by his son, Ulugh Beg, in Samarqand, where the yasa
survived under the Uzbeks in the tenth/sixteenth century.

In elaborating his model of the 'military patronage state' with reference to
the Ilkhanid and Timurid dynasties, Hodgson noted the character of the yasa
as the law of the military estate, of which the civilian population took no
cognisance, but also noted the increased importance of 'dynastic law' as the sum
total of the royal decrees as long as the dynasty remained in power. 30 The
nomadic tribal confederations that established these empires transformed them
selves into permanent ruling castes after conquest, and remained rigidly separate

30

Hodgson, The venture oflsUm, vol. II, pp. 406

250

Legitimacy and political organisation

from the civilian population, to which they cultivated the ties of patronage by
holding courts and founding endowments. Holding enormous undifferenti
ated land grants (suyurghal), which did not distinguish between fiscal and
prebendal elements, they became the landlords of the peasant masses. The
royal decrees (yarligh, farman) created a written body of state law, while the
yasa as the law of the military estate, enforced by a special prosecutor,

yarghuchi, introduced a new element of legal pluralism. Yarghu appears to
have been extended to the viziers and high officials, and a special department
(dlwari) dealing with cases of peculation, treason and disputes among local
rulers under an amir i yarghu is mentioned in the sources.

In Egypt and Syria, meanwhile, a different type of regime had already taken
shape: the Mamluk sultanate. The mamluk generals of the last Ayyubids who
were in control of Egypt in 658/1260 defeated the Mongol army at 'Aynjalut in
Syria, and one of them, Baybars, who had seized power by murdering the
victor of c Ayn Jalut, established an alleged survivor of the 'Abbasid family as
caliph in Cairo in 659/1261. The shadow 'Abbasid caliphate persisted in Cairo
until the Ottoman conquest in 923/1517, and made the Mamluk sultanate
distinct from other post Mongol Muslim monarchies.

Following the argument of the preceding section, we can say that the caliph
as a powerless commander of the faithful and a political cipher served as a
symbol of the separation of the religious and political spheres even better than
the hidden imam of the Imami Shi'a. This is clear in a decree of investiture in
which the Cairo caliph prefaces the conferment of divinely granted sultanate
by first justifying the office of caliphate (in the same vein as the Sunni and
Shfite jurists of Baghdad had done) as the precondition for the prevalence of
the shafi order. In other words, it was a precondition for the legal validity,
'according to the four official schools of law', of marriages contracted and
transactions carried out by Muslims, and for the appointment of the qadis and
officials. 31

The Islamic policy of Baybars in fact had three elements. He was a mamluk
convert to Islam, and his sponsor at the gathering that elected him had based
his title on regicide according to the custom of the Turks. As his subjects

clearly did not know this alleged custom of the Turks, Baybars was badly in
need of Islamic legitimacy, and the 'Abbasid caliph's primary function was to
provide it. The function of conferring legitimacy on the Mamluk sultan by the
caliph also meant the endorsement of the Mamluk sultan's claim to champion

31 Ahmad ibn 'Ah al Qalqashanch, Subh al a'shaji sina'at al insha', 14 vols. (Beirut, 1987),
vol. X, p. 56.

251

Islam in the jihad against the Mongols and the Crusaders on behalf of the
entire community of believers. This proved an asset in Mamluk foreign policy,
as some post Mongol regimes that wished to enhance their Islamic credentials,
such as the Tughluq shahs in Delhi and the Muzaffarids in Fars in the eighth/
fourteenth century, would on occasion strike coins in the name of the Cairo
caliph. (At one time, coins of the Delhi sultanate bore his name even three
years after his death!) Needless to say, however, the policy of championship of
holy war against the Mongols and the Franks in the seventh/thirteenth
century did not depend on the caliph but was vigorously voiced by the
spokesmen of the Mamluk regime.

Baybars' Islamic policy also had a third element. He was not foolish enough
to give the caliph exclusive purchase over the sharH order. On the contrary, he
promoted the more obvious identification of Islam with the estate of the

^ulama' as its official representatives, and enhanced the dejure legal pluralism
under Islam by the institution of four chief justices for the four official schools
of law in Cairo in 663/1265. The same system was established in Damascus in
the same year. The four qadls also performed the function of conferring
legitimacy on the sultan by countersigning the caliph's decree of investiture
as witnesses and taking part alongside him in the crowning ceremony, while
the division of the clerical estate enhanced the sultan's control. Nevertheless,
given the relatively small number of the Mamluk elite and the surprising
barring of their offspring from military careers, the Mamluk sultans and amirs
were in fact more dependent on the good will of the c ulama\ and contributed,
through extensive endowments (awqaf), to the development of the civic and
religious institutions under the control of the latter state on a much larger
scale than the ruling elite of the Turco Mongolian monarchies of the east. For
this reason the Mamluk regime could also be called a 'military patronage state'.

The most distinctive feature of the Mamluk regime, however, consists in its
being the first lasting Muslim polity under a system of collective rule. Young
mamluks were military slaves purchased and trained by the Mamluk amirs,
who became their masters (ustadh), and, upon emancipation, entered the
military household of the amir as comrades (khushdashiyya) at his service.
The amirs elected the sultan among themselves. Hereditary succession did
occur after the charismatic warlords Baybars and Qalawun, but was never
officially justified. Furthermore, when succession did become hereditary in
the dynasty of Qalawun, most of the sultans were puppets of the heads of the
Mamluk households. In contrast to the Turco Mongolian nomadic empires
the Mamluk state was remarkably centralised, with the iata 1 land assignments

Legitimacy and political organisation

not usually including revenue collection prerogatives and remaining under
tight central control and rarely being inherited, and a bureaucracy heavily
manned by religious minorities, especially the Copts a fact that presumably
facilitated their large scale conversion in the eighth/ fourteenth century. The
iqta' sytem sustained the tripartite Mamluk military system. The largest went
to the amirs with mamluk retinues, the smallest were shared by the obsolescent
halqa (circle) troops, surviving units of Ayyubid bodyguards, while the royal
Mamluks were maintained from the crown land, whose size increased
dramatically with the cadastral survey and redistribution in 715/13^. The
other special features of the Mamluk regime included the office of regent
(na'ib al saltcma), who represented the sultan, especially in his court of justice
idar al c adl), and whose position gained in importance as the Mamluk sultan
ceased jihad expeditions to Syria, but eventually declined somewhat with the
takeover of the function of hearing petitions at the court of justice by the hajib
(chamberlain). The title was also borne by the governors who represented the
sultan in the Syrian region. The office ofatabak, inherited from the Ayyubids,
was also transformed into that of the senior Mamluk amir. 32

While both hadith traditionalism and Greek political science were exer
cising considerable influence on the literature on political ethics in Iran and the
Delhi sultanate, the extinction of the caliphate had a strong impact on the
development of juristic theory under the Mamluks. In his tract on public law,

Tahrir al ahkamfi tadbir ahl al islam (Treatise on the ordinances concerning the
management of Muslims), the Shafi'ite judge of Damascus Badr al Din ibn Jama'a (d. 733/1333) completely blurred the distinction between the imamate,
the caliphate and the sultanate by deliberately alternate synonymous pairing
of imam and sultan and, less frequently, the caliphate and the sultanate as
the source of all legitimate authority and validity of all judicial, administrative
and military appointments. He added compulsion to election as a legitimate
mode of establishing the imamate and introduced a corresponding notion of'bay'a [made valid] by compulsion' (qahriyya), thus legitimising the imamate
(not just the 'emirate') by seizure in terms of 'the public interest and unity of the Muslims'. 33 In his three chapters on the imamate he absorbed
virtually all the major maxims of Persian statecraft and wisdom without any
disparagement of their normative status, and proceeded to sanction the validity of the iqta' land grants as practised under the Mamluk sultanate. It is

32 P. M. Holt, 'The structure of government in the early Mamluk sultanate', in P. M. Holt
(ed.), The eastern Mediterranean lands in the period of the Crusades (Warminster, 1977).

33 Badr al Din Ibn Jama'a, 'Handbuch des islamischen Staats und Verwaltungsrechtes von
Badr ad din Ibn Gama'a', ed. Hans Kofler, Islamiea, 6, 4 (1934), pp. 356 7.

253

The New Cambridge History of Islam

interesting to note, however, that some current practices are not sanctioned.

Ibn Jama'a does not allow any levies on the commerce of the Muslims (but
only on that of the infidels), and likewise restricts the fiscal authority of non
Muslim officials to the official minorities.

The irrelevance of the caliphate under the Mamluk regime resulted in an
even greater shift in the juristic political theory of public law with the
appearance in Damascus of Kitab al siyasa al shafvyya (Book of shafl statecraft)
by Ibn Jama'a's Hanbali contemporary, Taqi al Din ibn Taymiyya (d. 728/
1328). While rejecting the requirement that the Muslim community
should have only a single imam, plausible though contrary to fact during
the 'Abbasid caliphate, Ibn Taymiyya rested Islamic unity on the solidarity of
the community (jama c a) and its adherence to the practice of the pious
ancestors (salaf). The rulers and their appointees were typically referred to
as 'authorities' (wulat), and their duty, never defined with reference to the
umma, was 'the improvement of the subjects' (islah al raHyya), as expressed in
the subtitle of the treatise on public law. Imamate and caliphate were not at all
necessary as long as the rulers sought the advice of the i ulama\ enforced the
divine commandments and maintained the shafi order. While recognising
public law as 'governmental custom' QaAa sultaniyya) Ibn Taymiyya, unlike al
Mawardi and al Ghazali, did not try his hand at the ethics and advice genre, but
rather sought to integrate it into Islamic jurisprudence. Government and
exercise of authority could be brought in line with the general principles of
jurisprudence, as their ultimate purpose was enjoining good and forbidding
evil, while the rules of the sharfa applied more flexibly when required by
public interest (maslaha). Thus, in contrast to the theory of Islamic monarchy
under the 'king of Islam', Ibn Taymiyya's juristic theory subordinated mon
archy to the shafi order. As such, it can be considered a programme for
Islamic or sharVa based government, but it did not reflect the public law of the
Mamluk or any other regime.

Malay sultanates

The Persian theory of kingship and dynastic state (dawla) travelled to Malaysia
via northern India and Gujarat in the early ninth/ fifteenth century. The
Hindu Buddhist kings of Melaka adopted the title of syah {shah) two gener
ations before that of sultan, which appears with the adoption of Islam as the
religion of the royal house by Sultan Muzaffar Shah (r. 1444 59), who codified
the laws of Melaka, adding certain provisions of the shar7a to customary law.
There was a basic continuity in the conception of government as kerajaan

254

Legitimacy and political organisation

(being in the condition of having a raja), and the conception of dawlat as
divinely sanctioned state was distinctively coupled with derhaka, or treason
towards the raja, as tantamount to sin against God. 34 Nevertheless, the
conception of the ruler became recognisably Perso Islamicate. With the
Persian theory of kingship also came the maxim of the two powers, 'kingship
and prophecy are two jewels on the same ring'. Our earliest source explains
that 'the just Raja is joined with the Prophet of God like two jewels in one
ring. Moreover, the Raja is as it were the deputy of God.' 35 Sultans of Melaka,
and following them other Malay sultans, styled themselves as 'caliph' and
'shadow of God on earth' on their coins, which indicates their adoption of the
model of Islamic royalism. 3 As the factor second to royal patronage in the
spread of Islam was Sufism, the ruler could also claim spiritual perfection,
and represented Islam without the rivalry of the clerical estate, the c ulama\ the
qadis usually being relatives of the sultan, and sometimes a descendant of Sufi
shaykhs.

The Malay sultanate was, however, very different from the types of political
regime that developed elsewhere in the Muslim world. The enormous
Chinese propelled growth of maritime trade by the beginning of the ninth/
fifteenth century, to which the Portuguese and Dutch were to contribute a
century later, set the stage for the emergence of cosmopolitan city states
oriented to overseas trade rather than agricultural production in the hinter
land, where important state functions could be given to foreign merchants.
State formation in these new multi ethnic mercantile cities was the work of
the class oforang kaya (lit. rich man) who constituted the consultative council
(mesyuarat (mashwarat) Heard) of nobles, one of whom would often be the
sultan. The four highest officials of the state were the bendahara (grand
treasurer and at times prime minister), the tumenggung (police chief), the
laksamana (admiral) and the syahbandar (shahbandaf) (port master; a Persian
term that had travelled through the coastal regions of India). Melaka was the
first such city state to adopt Islam and, with it, superimpose the imported
conception of Muslim monarchy on the model the anthropologist Clifford
Geertz calls negara, or the theatre state, in the direction of Islamic royalism.
However, the sultan was chosen in consultation with the orang kaya, and there
was constant rivalry between the sultan and the bendahara in the manipulation

34 Barbara Watson Andaya and Leonard Y. Andaya, A history of Malaysia, 2nd edn
(Honolulu, 2001), p. 47.

35 Sejarah Melayu or Malay annals, trans, and annotated C. C. Brown, new introd.
R. Roolvink (Kuala Lumpur, 1970), p. in,

36 A. C. Milner, 'Islam and Malay kingship', JBAS, 1 (1981), p. 52.

The New Cambridge History of Islam

of consensus (muafakat) of the orang kaya in the consultative council. The
sultanate of Melaka, which was multiplied throughout South East Asia after
the conquest of the city by the Portuguese in 1511, can thus be considered,
alongside the contemporary Mamluk sultanate in Syria and Egypt, the second
major type of Muslim regime characterised by collective rule.

As compared to the rest of the Muslim world, trade rather than agriculture
was the main source of the sultan's revenue. Maritime and commercial
matters were covered fairly extensively in the oldest law code, and there is
an extant mid seventeenth century port law of Kedah that promulgated the
public law administered by the syahbandar. 37 The sultan was the first merchant
of his domains, and a committee of merchants assessed the value of the cargo
in the presence of the police chief, the tumenggung, who immediately levied
the customs duties. The Sejarah Melayu declared: 'Where there is a dynastic
state (dawlai), there is gold/ 38 Melaka basically consisted of four colonies (sing.
kampong) for the Gujaratis (the most important), the Keling (Tamils), the
Javanese (with the largest population) and the Chinese, each under the
administration of a colony syahbandar, who probably had military functions
and armed his clients, as did the merchants themselves. The legal system of
the Malay sultanate was dualistic. A very clear and basic distinction is made
between the law of the land (hukum negeri) and the law of God (hukum Allah) 39
and is systematically followed throughout, with the (law of) qanun (hukum

qanun) as a synonym for the former. The rules of either law are stipulated
where appropriate, but in cases when the two vary, provisions of both the
qcmuri and the sharfa are stated side by side, suggesting that the judge could
enforce either. The qadx enforced the code in his court, but his was not the
most important court, and the bendahara had his own court, as did the
syahbandar, who dealt with maritime and commercial cases.

Johor, where the royal family of Melaka moved after its fall to the
Portuguese in 1511 and ruled until 1722, was the immediate successor state,
but the sultanates of Pahang and Sumatra also affiliated with it, as did the
rulers of Perak. Further east, Islam was spread in Maluku (possible derivation
from muluk) by the sultans of Ternate in the sixteenth century, who acted as

37 R. O. Winstedt, 'Kedah laws', Journal of the Malayan Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society, 6
(1928), pp. 2 7, 15 26.

38 Quoted in Leonard Andaya, 'The structure of power in seventeenth century Johor', in
Anthony Reid and Lance Casdes (eds.), Pre colonial state systems in Southeast Asia (Kuala
Lumpur, 1975), p. 3 (translation modified to conform to the usage of the term dawla[t] in
this chapter).

39 Liaw Yock Fang (ed.), Undang undang Melaka: The laws of Melaka (The Hague, 1976),
pp. 68 9.

Legitimacy and political organisation

religious teachers of their people and heads of Islamic institutions and bore the
titles 'shadow of God on the earth' and 'the perfect man'. The great majority
of the population, however, remained unconverted. The sultan appointed a
brother or relative as the kali (qadT) and, as Islam grew, created two new posts
which bore the title of hukm, whose incumbents conducted judicial hearing
'by reason and custom'. 40 The Malay sultanate was transplanted even as far
away as Cotabato in the southern Philippines, where a certain sarip (sharifi
Kabungsuwan, claiming descent from the fallen Melakan royal family through
his mother, established a sultanate and applied elements of Shafi'i law along
side the customary law, which were compiled together into a code of law in
the mid eighteenth century. 41

The Malay sultanate regime, classically combining Muslim royalism and
mercantile collective rule in Melaka and Johor, could develop in either
direction along the continuum. Until their conquest by the Dutch in 1621
the tiny Banda islands represented the one exceptional extreme of rule by a
kingless oligarchy of orang kaya. Transformation in the opposite direction of
autocracy is represented by the cases of Aceh, Banten and East Java in the
seventeenth century. The exemplary case is perhaps the rise of autocracy in
Aceh, a prosperous mercantile city state in the sixteenth century consisting
of five ethnic colonies. Under Sultan Ala] al Din Ri'ayat Shah, al Sayyid
al Mukammil (1589 1604), a title indicative of his claim to be the spiritual
guide of his people and the 'perfect man' of the Sufis, and his protege Iskandar
Muda (Young Alexander) (1607 36), we witness the destruction of the oli
garchy and centralisation of power, creation of palace guards and establish
ment of a royal trade monopoly. 42

As is typical with the advice literature on monarchy, the Taj al salatin (The
crown of rulers), compiled from a Persian source for the autocratic sultan of

Aceh in 1603, opens its preface with 'Say God, possessor of kingship, you give
kingship to whomever you will, and take away kingship from whomever you
will' (Q 3:26). The core of Bustan al salatin (The garden of rulers), written in
the mid seventeenth century, is a 'History of the prophets and kings' that
begins with a chapter on the prophets from Adam to Muhammad, followed by
one on the Persian kings until the time of 'Umar. There follow chapters on the

40 Leonard Y. Andaya, The world of Maluku: Eastern Indonesia in tfte early modern period
(Honolulu, 1993), pp. 62, 70.

41 Thomas McKenna, Muslim rulers and rebels: Everyday polities and armed separation in the
southern Philippines (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1998), pp. 48 68.

42 Anthony Reid, 'Trade and state power in the 16th and 17th century Southeast Asia', in
Proceedings of the Seventh IAHA Conference (Bangkok, 1977).

257

kings of other nations, the last three being on the Muslim rulers of Delhi, the
rulers of Melaka and Pahang, and finally, the rulers of Aceh. It is interesting
to note that the Malay sultans typically claimed descent from Iskandar Dhu'l
Qarnayn (Alexander the Great), whose name was taken by the first raja of
Melaka who assumed the title of shah, and by many others, including the
above mentioned autocrat of Aceh, Iskandar Muda. Alexander was a conven

ient figure, as he was considered both a prophet and a Persian king, and royal
descent from him was through other Persian kings, notably Khusrau Anushlrwan, the Just.

Centralised autocracy in South East Asia was unstable, however. In Aceh the mercantile oligarchy made its comeback and perfected a variant of collective rule under reigning queens (1641 99), beginning with Queen Taj
al 'alam (1641 75). The type also emerged elsewhere, generating in Sumatra
the symbol of female good governance of the ideal queen, somewhat generic
ally called Ratu Sinuhun in Palembang. Also close to the centre of our typological continuum was the sultanate of Perak in the eighteenth century.
The sultan was the deputy (khalifa) of God on earth, and one of them, Raja
Iskandar, was typically said to be 'blessed with good fortune (tuah), dawlat
[divinely ordained sovereignty], wisdom and nobility ... who governed according to the laws of Allah and of l adat [customary law], protecting his
people'. At the same time sultans were selected from the royal offspring (anak
raja) by the oligarchs, whose consultative council had 300 members, according
to Dutch reports. The idea of the ruler as the shepherd of the flock finds an
interesting maritime supplement, and he is said to be the captain (nakhuda) of
the ship of state, and his ministers his crew. Unlike Melaka and Johor, however,
Perak was not a mercantile city state oriented to overseas trade, but was more
dependent on the hinterland, and therefore on the inland territorial chiefs {prang
besar). The chiefs were accordingly urged alongside the ministers to 'support
their Raja and consider the welfare of the rakyat [subjects]'. 43

The patrimonial-bureaucratic empires

The Ottomans combined the Persianate and Turco Mongolian traditions of
kingship with the law. Like his predecessors Mehmed II was the 'king

(padishah) of Islam', and had added 'God's caliph' to his titles in accordance
with Muslim royalism long before becoming 'the Conqueror' with the

43 Cited from various sources by Barbara Watson Andaya, 'The nature of the state in
eighteenth century Perak', in Reid and Casdes (eds.), Pre colonial state systems, pp. 23 4, 28.

overthrow of the Byzantine empire. By the beginning of the ninth /fifteenth
century the legitimacy of the Ottoman kings was enhanced by their conquest
of Christian lands, and they were presented as holy warriors, the term celebrating this status, ghazi, being anachronistically projected onto the early eighth/fourteenth century Ottoman raiders (akinci). Mehmed II enhanced his legitimacy as the leader of the holy war (ghaza) by assuming
the title commander of the faithful. The Turkish tradition, however, came to
prominence with the proclamation of his law upon the conquest of Constantinople in 857/1453. Under the early Ottomans the yasa had gradually
lost its Mongol connotations in the ninth/fifteenth century and, in the forms
yasagh and yasagh name, came to common use as code of law, especially of
penal law, being used as a synonym for siyasat name, and was thus assimilated
to the qanun.

Mehmed the Conqueror's re L aya qanun name was the first step in the lasting institutionalisation of the dynastic law of the Ottomans. It was greatly
enlarged through the inclusion of subsequent royal decree laws {qanun hukm)

and published by Bayazid II as Kitab i qawanin i c urfiyya yi c Uthmaniyya (Book
of Ottoman customary laws) in 907/1501, revised further under SelTm I (r. 918
26/1512 20) as Qanun nama yi 'Uthmarii (Ottoman law code) and then reissued
with further addition of minor decree laws as the Law of the Ottoman
Dynasty (Qanun i c UthmanT) by Siileyman the Lawgiver (qanunT) (r. 926 74/
1520 66). This marked the culmination of the age of law. The Ottoman law
was periodically revised and updated, and was also referred to as the law code
(qanun name) of the illustrious Conqueror and Siileyman. 44 The distinctive
Ottoman judicial organisation was that the qadis administered both the shaft a
and the state law (qanun). Justice as the cornerstone of government by the
padishah, symbolised by a 'tower of justice ('adalet)' at the Ottoman court, was
also institutionalised in tandem. The mazalim court was organised as the royal
court (diwan i humayun), receiving thousands of petitions from the subjects
every month, which were recorded in a registry of complaints, and periodic
ally issuing 'decrees of justice' (l adalet name). Siileyman's justice decree of 1565,
for example, regulated the relations between state officials and the subjects,
threatening officials guilty of maladministration and fiscal exaction with the
direst of punishments.

With the rise of the Ottoman empire, the social stratification system of the
Turco Mongolian empires to the east underwent considerable change, as did

44 H. Inalcik, 'Suleiman the Lawgiver and Ottoman law', Archivum Ottomanicum, 1 (1969),
esp. p. 125.

the system ofmamluk recruitment to the west. The caste boundaries between
the military estate and the civilian bureaucracy were broken, and the officials
of the bureaucracy and of the judiciary were absorbed into the ^askefi estate
that came to comprise everyone working for the state as against the subjects,
the re'aya. Two high judicial offices were created for the qadi c askers of
Anatolia and Rome (Rumeli, as the former Byzantine lands were called)
who dealt with the legal affairs of the c askeri estate.

'Men of the sword' (sayfi), as the military component of the enlarged c askeri
estate, were of two different kinds. The first was a landowning cavalry (sipahT),
each of whom had to arm himself and one or two men with the income from a
modest land assignment (timaf), representing an extraordinary refinement of
the tqta' system made possible by the detailed cadastral surveys compiled by
the Ottomans upon conquest. The second component was the corps of new
soldiers (yeni geri or Janissary) of royal slaves that was a unique and enduring
institutionalisation of the mamluk system of military organisation extended to
administration. The conquest of the Christian lands in Europe enabled the
Ottomans to transform the recruitment of military slaves into the centralized
devsirme system of levies of boys to be trained as the sultan's slaves that formed
the military and administrative backbone of the empire from the ninth/
fifteenth century onward. In a remarkable transformation of patrimonialism,
the Ottomans preserved the centrality of the palace as the household of the
ruler by training the royal slaves and sons of the nobility for 'inner' (enderiin)

palace service, and after a graduation ceremony (fikma), where they could be
joined by other members of the 'askeri estate with the requisite rank, were
assigned to 'outer' (birun) service and appointed to district and provincial
governorships, thus introducing a strong element of bureaucratic rationalisa
tion while still treating administration of the empire as the extension of the
household of the sultan and allowing high officials to maintain their own
households of large personal retinues.

In 907/1501, the year Bayazid II reissued the Code of Ottoman Law, a
millenarian Shi'ite revolution was launched by a charismatic youth of
fourteen, Isma'il, at the head of the Safavid Sufi order in Anatolia and Iran,
making an unmistakable bid for world domination. The revolution succeeded in
Iran but was suppressed in Anatolia by Selim I at the beginning of his reign. Like
all revolutions Shah IsmaTTs produced a large body of exiles, consisting of
Iranian Sunrii notables who fled east and west, and set in motion an interaction
between ShTite and Sunni Islam whose consequences for the development of
public law were as momentous as those in the medieval development of the
theory of imamate surveyed in the earlier sections of this chapter. To stop the

260

Legitimacy and political organisation

expansion of the Safavid empire the Uzbeks in the east and the Ottomans in the
west solicited the help of these Sunnl jurists to act as defenders of Islamic
orthodoxy against the rampant new heresy. On both sides, prominent jurists

supplied the rulers with fatwas making the shedding of the blood of the Safavid
Turkish troops, the Qizilbash, lawful indeed, obligatory.

In the east, the rise of the Safavids and their chiliastic disregard of the sharTa
provoked one of Dawani's students, the Shafi'ite jurist Fadlallah Ruzbihan
Khunji (d. 927/1521), to produce a remarkable book on public law. Unlike the
Ottoman code, it was not an actual code of law but, like Ibn Taymiyya's and
with the same sense of crisis, a programme for reform in the face of the
perceived threat, emanating from the Safavid uprising, to the survival of the
sharVa. After a few years in hiding and exile, Khunji called upon the Uzbek
Muhammad Khan Shibani to be the renewer (mujaddid) of the tenth century
(beginning in 1494 CE). In Mihman nama yt Bukhara, written in 916/1509, the
Khan was addressed as 'the Imam of the Age (imam al zamcm) and the Deputy
of the Merciful (khalifat al rahman)'. Muhammad Khan was not to be the
renewer of the tenth century, however, and fell in the battle of Marw a year
later; Shah Isma'il made his skull into a drinking cup. Khunji had to wait four
more years for 'Ubayd Allah Khan to emerge from the struggle for succession
and adopt the cause of orthodox restoration, prompting him to write a
programme for shari'a based government as a law book for him in 920/1514
entided Suluk al muluk (The manner of kings).

The programmatic nature of his treatise, 'an exposition of the [prescribed]
acts of the Imam and the ruler', is explicit: 'If the ruler of Islam, who has
secured his domination through seizure of power because he lacked some of
the conditions for the Imamate, wants to obtain the sovereignty (saltanat) of
Islam and kingship by right, he must carry out the very acts that are necessary
for the Imam.' Having enumerated three legally valid (but unrealistic) ways of
establishing the imamate, he follows Ibn Jama'a in endorsing the one that is
relevant to his time:

The fourth manner in which the establishment of kingship (padshahT) and the
Imamate is caused is through domination and power (shawkat). The 'ulanuV
have said that when the Imam dies and a person takes charge of the Imamate
without a bay' a and without anyone having made him Caliph, and subjugates
the people by power and force of the army, his Imamate is established
without a bay 1 a, whether or not he is from the Quraysh, whether or not he
is an Arab, a Persian or a Turk, whether or not he has the qualifications, even
if he is corrupt and ignorant . . . [He] is [nevertheless] called the Sultan, and the
titles of Imam and Caliph can be given to him. And God knows best ... The

261

The New Cambridge History of Islam

'ulama" have said that obedience to the Imam and the Sultan in whatever they
command and forbid is incumbent, be he just or tyrannical (ja'ir), so long as
[what he commands] is not contrary to the shari'a . . . He is called the Caliph
and the Imam and the Commander of the Faithful and the Deputy (khalifa)
of the Messenger of God, but it is not permissible to call him the Deputy
of God. 45

Khunji's response to Isma c il's 'heretical 1 i.e. mahdistic charismatic
authority on behalf of the Uzbeks was the proclamation of the Khan as the
'deputy of the merciful' and the 'imam of the age'. Lutfi Pasha, Siileyman's
grand vizier (946 8/1539 41), did the same for the Ottoman sultan. Pushing

Ibn Jama'a's argument for the legitimacy of imamate by compulsion to the
extreme in a tract written in Persian and translated into Arabic, Lutfi Pasha
dismissed descent from the Quraysh as irrelevant and, claiming to prove his
argument on the basis of traditions rather than rationally, he calls Sultan
Suleyman, son of SalTm Khan son of Bayezld Khan, the just imam of the age
who maintains the congregational prayer and the 'Id festivals, who is also the
caliph and invested with authority (wall) by God. 46 The theory of the Ottoman
caliphate was endorsed by Siileyman's great shaykh al islam (chief mufti), Abu
'1 Su'ud, who considered his royal patron 'the shadow of God over all people'
and the 'possessor of the supreme Imamate', and used the sultan's authority as
imam and caliph to justify legislation by decree law in civil matters. 47

Notable among the learned jurists who participated in SelTm I's campaign
against the Qizilbash was Kemal Pashazada (d. 940/1534), who was later
appointed the shaykh alisldm (932 40/152.6 34). Kemal Pashazada issued
injunctions declaring the Qizilbash infidels, their territory the land of war,
and the waging of holy war (jihad) against them the individually incumbent
duty of every Muslim, assigning the task of a more detailed refutation of
the Safavid claims to his student, Abu '1 Su'ud Muhammad ibn Muhyi al Din
'Imadi. Abu '1 Su c ud Efendi, who was from the Kurdish region under Safavid
domination, enumerated the deviations of the Qizilbash from orthodoxy,
refuting Shah Isma'il's claim to descent from 'All and the Safavid claim to
being a ShTite sect, and considered fighting against the Qizilbash the most
important duty of the Muslim. 48 He later rose to prominence, holding the

45 Fadlallah Ruzbihan KhunjI, Suliik al muliik (Hyderabad, 1966), pp. 39, 47 8.

46 H. A. R. Gibb, 'Lutfi Pasa on the Ottoman caliphate', Oriens, 15 (1962), pp. 287 95.

47 Colin Imber, 'Ideals and legitimation in early Ottoman history', in M. Kunt and
C. Woodhead (eds.), Suleyman the Magnificent and his age (London, 1995), pp. 152 3.

48 E. Eberhard, Osmanische Polemik gegen die Safawiden im 16. Jahrhundert nach arahischen
Handschriften (Freiburg im Breisgau, 1970), pp. 164 7.

office of shaykh al islam (952 82/1545 74), and was a chief architect of the
Ottoman judicial organisation. The construction of the imposing Ottoman judicial system by these two chief muftis was in part a reaction to the hetero
dox Safavid revolution. It included appointment of muftis (jurisconsults) in
addition to judges, all ranked hierarchically under the shaykh al islam of Istanbul, and went hand in hand with the exclusive establishment of the Hanafi rite in Anatolia and the building by Abu '1 Su'ud of mosques in villages
to force the population to pray according to the official rite.

There was also a consistent effort to rationalise the two components of Muslim monarchy, the religious and the temporal, into an integrated system
of authority. Lutfi Pasha wrote a concise practical manual on the craft of vizierate, called Asifnama after Solomon's legendary vizier, Asif, and financial
administration grew in importance and became more specialised, beginning the
differentiation and rationalisation of tax farming into the Ottoman iltizam system. Siileyman allowed a group of determined madrasa trained clerical
bureaucrats to reconcile the qanun and the shaifa. Foremost among the group
from the side of the religious hierarchy was the above mentioned Abu '1 Su'ud

Efendi, and from the side of the bureaucracy, the chancellor (nisanci) Mustafa
Jalalzada (941 63/1534 56). In drafting decree laws and administrative directives
Jalalzada was mindful of the shaft a and sought to make them consistent with it.
The section of the law code of Mehmed the Conqueror on administrative
organisation had introduced a rational bureaucratic distinction between rank
and office, allowing the lateral movement of the holders of high judicial, financial
and secretarial offices to become provincial governors alongside those in the two
branches of the military elite. Judge Qinalizada, in the above mentioned Akhlaq i
^aWi, considered the Ottoman qanun as a set of dynastic laws supportive of the
shari c a and derived, with clerical advice, from principles of Islamic jurisprudence.
His student, All Pasha (d. 1009/ 1600), like him a clerical bureaucrat and a
beneficiary of the lateral movement allowed by the Conqueror's code, expressed
great faith in imperial law (qanun i padshahT), maintaining that 'the chancellors
should be the jurisconsults (muftis) of imperial law'. He also remained convinced
of its compatibility and need for articulation with the shaifa. This 'qanun consciousness' can be taken as a distinct form of Ottoman constitutionalism
that prevailed in the tenth/ sixteenth century. 49

The success of this attempt should not be exaggerated. Abu '1 Su'ud's promotion of the sultan as the imam was useful for his judicial reforms but

49 Cornell H. Fleischer, Bureaucrat and intellectual in tfte Ottoman empire: The historian
Mustafa Ali (1541 1600) (Princeton, 1986), chap. 6; quotation at p. 228.

263

receded from the public domain, while in the increasing size of the bureau
cracy and its specialisation made more rigid the lines dividing the 'men of the
pen' in general, and the 'ulamff in particular, from the military administrative
elite of the empire, resulting in growing tension between the religious and
temporal elements in Ottoman constitutionalism in the seventeenth century.
The qdnun consciousness was transformed into a nostalgia for the Ottoman
golden age and bemoaning of the decline in advice literature (nasihat nomas),
while the religious hierarchy demonstrated its opposition to state law by
prevailing upon the sultan in 1107/ 1696 to issue a decree law forbidding the
mentioning of the qdnun and the shar7a side by side.

Meanwhile, the development of religious authority in Iran proceeded along
a path unique in Islamic history. The consolidation of the Safavid revolution
required the routinisation of the charisma of Shah Isma'il as an invincible war
hero who claimed divine incarnation and mahdihood into a stable structure of
authority. Monarchy and hierocracy were the super and subordinate compo
nents of this structure of authority. There was in fact a radical change in the
conception of kingship. Popular Sufism, which became increasingly tinged
with the ShTite expectation of the manifestation of the mahdl in the mid
ninth/fifteenth century, infused a sacral element into the idea of kingship as
temporal rule. Isma'il's father (and grandfather) had sought the 'unification of
dervishhood and kingship' (jam' i darwlshiwa shahi (i.e. material and spiritual
monarchy)). 50 The popular Sufi conception of unified material and spiritual
monarchy was institutionalised under Shah Isma'il and reconciled with Imami

Shi'ism by his successors, who claimed to be the lieutenants of the hidden
Imam. The Shi'ite conception of 'All as the wall alldh (friend of God) was key in
the fusion the Sufi notion of wilayat (friendship of God) and the juristic
meaning of the term as 'authority'; the Safavids conjoined both senses by
claiming descent from the seventh imam, Musa al Kazim, and accordingly by
calling themselves the house of wilayat. In a decree issued in 917/1511 Shah
Isma'il claims divine sanction for his sovereignty (saltanat) and caliphate
(khilafat) by citing the Qur'an (Q 2:118 and 38:25), and refers to the Safavid
house as the 'dynasty of spiritual authority (wilayat) and Imamate'. 51 With the
assumption of the tide of shah at the outset, the Safavids relied primarily on
the traditional legitimacy of Persianate kingship. However, a sacral element

50 Khwand Amir, Habib al siyar, ed. M. Dabfr Siyaqi, 4 vols. (Tehran, 1362/1983), vol. IV,
p. 426. Note below the author's own transplantation of this conception to the Mughal
empire at the end of his life.

51 A. H. Nava'i, Shah Isma'il Safavi: Asnad wa mukatibati tdrlkhl (Tehran, 1347/ 1969),
pp. 101 3.

264

Legitimacy and political organisation

was superimposed on it as a residue of the Sufi Shi'ite charismatic leadership of
Isma'il. A decree of appointment issued by the last Safavid shah, Sultan Husayn

(1105 35/1694 1722) is quite explicit in distinguishing the two elements: 'As the
perfect being of our fortunate majesty derives from the light of Prophecy and
Authority (wilayat), obeying [our] command is more incumbent upon the God
fearing than that of other kings of kings.' 52 This new sacral idea of kingship was,
however, inconsistent with the logic of ShTism, and collapsed with the Safavid
empire in 1135/ 1722, making for the return of the traditional idea of monarchy as
temporal rule necessary for the prevalence of religion and the shaft order. The
routinisation of the charismatic war hero into the hereditary charisma of the
Safavid lineage as the family and lieutenants of the Shi'ite holy imams, together
with the Persian idea of kingship as monarchy over an undivided empire, was of
great importance for solving the succession problem of nomadic patrimonialism
that had resulted in the disintegration of the Timurid and successor empires,
though the absence of primogeniture still required the killing or blinding of the
princes of the royal household.

The declaration of Imami Shfism as the national religion of Iran by Shah
Isma'il also resulted in an unprecedented differentiation of religious and
political authority. The architect of the new hierocratic system of authority
under the Safavids was Shaykh 'All al Karaki (d. 940/1534), a Syrian who
responded to Isma'il's invitation to migrate to Iran. With the development
of jurisprudence in the medieval period there had been a tendency to transfer
some of the specific functions of the imam, such as his authority to marry
women without guardians, to the jurists. The most significant of these was the
transfer of the imam's function of holding the Friday congregational prayer by
some jurists. Glossing the 'Allama al Hilli's statement that the holding of the
congregational prayer required 'the just ruler (al sultan al 'adil) or whoever he
orders to do so', al Karaki states: According to our Consensus, the incum
bency of the congregational prayer is conditional upon the just ruler who is

the infallible Imam, or his deputy in general, or his deputy for the congregational
prayer.' The presumption of consensus here hides what is in fact a striking
departure from the earlier statements of the theory of the imamate. He again
conveniently claims consensus for the holding of the congregational prayer
being conditional upon the presence of the imam or his deputy. The reason in
both cases is that 'the secure jurist who has all the qualifications for issuing
opinions is appointed (mansub) by the Imam; therefore his ordinances (ahkam)

52 M. Dhabihi and M. Sutuda (eds.), Az Astara Xa Astarabad, 7 vols. (Tehran, n.d.[i976]), vol.
VI, p. 504.

265

are effective, and helping him to implement the hudud and to adjudicate
among the people is incumbent'. The idea of 'appointment' is linked to that
of being a 'deputy in general' by claiming that the imam has 'indeed appointed
a deputy in a general matter, as in the saying of [the sixth imam Ja c far] al Sadiq
reported by 'Umar b. Hanzala: "I have indeed appointed him an authority [hakiman] upon you.'" An additional proof of this appointment is the decree of
the hidden imam to the Shi'a which sets 'the reporters of our Traditions' as
'my proofs upon you, as I am the proof of God upon them'. 53

Al Karaki thus developed the notion of the 'general deputy ship /vice gerency' (niyaba C 3mma) of the imam during the occultation, and, as the

foremost Shi'ite jurist of 'the mujtahid of the age', claimed it for himself.

The Turcoman adepts of the Safavid order, who were known as Qizilbash
(redheads) on account of the headgear devised for them by Isma'il's
father,
were divided according to their clans, and a number of new Qizilbash
clans
were formed during the uprising. The Qizilbash troops remained divided
into
these clans and maintained by undifferentiated land grants (tuyul) and,
despite
their factionalism, were the military mainstay of the Safavid regime in
the
sixteenth century. They remained members of the now exclusively
military
Safavid Sufi order, and as such venerated the shah as their 'perfect
spiritual
guide' (murshid i kamil). In a major feat of centralisation, Shah c Abbas
the
Great in the first decade of the seventeenth century was able to subdue
the
factionalism of the Qizilbash troops, halving their number to some 30,000
and greatly reducing the dependence of the state on them by creating a
new
corps of some 12,000 musketeers and, more importantly, a slave corps
initially
consisting of some 4,000 recruited from Georgia, which increased until
its size
settled around 10,000 by mid century. His two successors, Safi (r. 1037
52/
1629 42) and 'Abbas II (r. 1052 77/1642 66), continued the policy of
central
isation by converting the inner provinces in their entirety into crown land
(khassa) and putting them under the administration of the commanders
of the
royal slave corps.

The question not addressed by al Karaki in the tenth/ sixteenth century
was
the relationship between the newly legitimised, impersonal hierocratic
authority and the old personal and patrimonial authority of the king. It
could be addressed only awkwardly within the framework of
jurisprudence,
and required the distinct literary genre on ethics and statecraft that had
been
developed to express the normative order of monarchy. The revival of

53 'All ibn al Husayn al Karaki al Muhaqqiq al Tham, Jami' al maqasid ft shark al qawaHd,
15 vols, so far (Beirut, 1991), vol. II, pp. 371 9.

266

Legitimacy and political organisation

philosophy in seventeenth century Isfahan as the new capital of the Safavid
empire made this new genre readily available as practical philosophy (hikmat i
'amalT), with Nasrr al Din Tusi's Akhlaq i nasiri serving as the model treatise. In
Gawhar i murad, 'Abd al Razzaq Lahiji considered prophecy and kingship as
the two sources of authority. The functions of the prophet and the ruler were
unified only in the Prophet Muhammad, and not in other prophets, who
always needed kings. 54 Lahiji' s younger contemporary, Mulla Muhammad
Baqir Sabzawari, the shaykh al islam of Isfahan under 'Abbas II, went a step
further in reconciling practical philosophy with Shi'ism. He recognised
the differentiation between 'the office (mansab) of prophecy' and 'the office
of monarchy (saltanat)', and was explicit in his reconciliation of kingship and
the Shi'ite theory of imamate. In his massive and widely circulated treatise on
political philosophy, Sabzawari stated that the lawgiver is indeed the Prophet,
and 'the just ruler ... is called Imam and God's Caliph'. However, when the
real (aslT) imam is in occupation, 'the people inevitably need a king to live with
justice and follow the custom and tradition (sirat wa sunnat) of the real
Imam'. 55 Such a king is his royal patron, the king of kings and shadow of
God, 'Abbas. This justification was in line with the Safavids' coupling of their

royal legitimacy with their charisma of lineage as the lieutenants and alleged
descendants of the immaculate imams. This was somewhat inconsistent with
the logic of Shi'ism and, after the disappearance of the Safavid dynastic vested
interest in maintaining it, it gave way to a more consistently dualistic theory.
However, in contrast to the Ottoman empire, there was no development in
the public law of monarchy, and Sabzawari in the second half of the seven
teenth century was content to reproduce medieval Persian ideas on statecraft
and political ethics within the framework of practical philosophy, while
administration and taxation were regulated by the decrees of the rulers. The
idea of hierocratic authority, by contrast, increasingly disengaged itself from
the personal, patrimonial matrix. With al Karaki's powerful legal fiction of
general vicegerency, the jurists could consider themselves invested, ex ante
and in perpetuity, by the hidden imam, thus possessing impersonal, official
authority. In practice, the institutionalisation of hierocratic authority could not
proceed as simply as in al Karaki's legal arguments, and was contested by the
clerical notables (sayyids) who controlled landed estates and held important
offices, most notably that of the sadr who controlled the religious endow
ments; and their contestation did not take long to appear at the theoretical

54 'Abd al Razzaq Lahiji, Gawhar i murad (Tehran, 1377/1958), pp. 293 5.

55 Muhammad Baqir Sabzawari, Rawdat al anwar i 'abbasl (Tehran 1377/1998), pp. 52, 65 7.

267

level either, and Akhbari traditionalism in fact slowly gained the upper hand
over jurisprudential rationalism in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.
More significantly, the enforcement of the shari'a through the state was never
effectively institutionalised, as it was in the Ottoman empire, and the office of
the qadi in fact declined with the rise of an independent hierocracy. 56
Nevertheless, on the foundations laid by al Karaki, an independent hierocracy
would stand after the collapse of the Safavid empire in the eighteenth century,
and would generate the dual structure of authority distinctive of Iran in the
Qajar period.

From the very beginning of his reign (1785 96) the founder of the Qajar
monarchy, Aqa Muhammad Khan, turned for help with consolidating his
power to the Shfite mujtahids who were leading the Usui! movement in
jurisprudence against Akhbari traditionalism. Around 1200/ 1787 a leading
mujtahid, Mirza Abu '1 Qasim Qummi, composed the Irshad natna for him,
maintaining that 'the rank of kingship is by divine decree' and explaining the
meaning of the term 'shadow of God'. However, his statement of the theory
of the two powers transferred the fulfilment of the prophetic function to the
hierocracy, while stressing the mutual interdependence of the king and his
'ulamtV: As God Most High has established kings for the protection of the
world of men ... the l u\ama' need them; and as He established the 'ulatnt? for
the protection of the religion of men ... the king and other than the king need
them.' Here, the hierocracy as the guardians of the prophetic heritage is put in
the place given to the prophets (whose heritage it guards) in the more
conventional formulations of the idea of the two powers in the medieval
statecraft literature. A more clearly traditional statement of the idea of duality
was offered by the royal librarian who served the second Qajar monarch:
'[God] has chosen two classes among mankind and given them the crown of

sovereignty and the ring of superiority. The first are the prophets . . . The second class consists of the rulers of the earth and the just kings ... After the
rank of prophecy, there shall be no position higher than kingship.' 57

State formation in the Delhi sultanate was mosdy the work of Turkish military slaves, except for the Khaljis (689 720/1290 1320), and the later Afghan dynasty of the Lodis (855 932/1451 1526). All the Delhi sultanate, however, drew upon the Persianate conception of kingship. At the end of the ninth /fifteenth century the Iranian immigrants also played the leading role

56 Arjomand, The shadow of God, chap. 5.

57 Quoted in S. A. Arjomand, 'Political ethic and public law in the early Qajar period',
Robert M. Gleave (ed.), Religion and society in Qajar Iran (London, 2005), p. 24.

268

Legitimacy and political organisation

in state formation in the Deccan. Early in the century Frruz Shah Bahmam
(r. 800 25/1397 1422) would reportedly send empty ships to the Persian Gulf
to bring back Iranian soldiers, administrators, traders and artists. One such
imported soldier who rose to prominence, Yusuf 'Adil Khan (r. 895 916/1490
1510) founded the dynasty of just kings', the c Adilshahi sultanate of Bijapur
and, emboldened by the news of the rise of Shah Isma'il in Iran, declared Shi c ism the official religion of his kingdom. Babur (r. 932 7/1526 30) took a
large number of Timurid officials with him to India, and almost half of the noblemen who accompanied Humayun after his restoration were Iranians. Iranians were the single largest group (as compared to the

Turanians and the Hindus) under Akbar, and their prominence increased under the vizierate of the father and brother of Nur i Jahan, the favourite Persian queen of Jahangtr (r. 1014 37/1605 27). They remained conspicuous throughout the seventeenth century, making up a quarter of Aurangzeb's (r. 1069 1118/1658 1707) nobility. 58 The Persianate theory of kingship as uni versal monarchy had its most lasting impact in India on the creation of the Mughal empire. As Timurids the Mughal emperors claimed divine sanction and legitimacy, as their dynasty had been founded by the great sahib qiran, and Shahjahan (r. 1037 68/1627 58) was even called the second sahib qiran, and some echoes of the Turkish conception of the law persisted, but the nomadic patrimonial rule of succession that Babur had been reluctant to give up (and proved disastrous for Humayun) died with him, leaving the field to the idea of padshahi as monarchy over an undivided empire.

Persian books on statecraft travelled with Babur from Kabul and Herat to India upon its conquest. The Timurid chief qadi of Herat, Ikhtiyar al Din Husayn al Husayni, met Babur after the conquest of India and retitled a book on the rules of vizierate Akhlaq i Humayum (Royal ethics) and dedicated it to him. Following Nasir al Din al Tusi, he assimilated shaft a to nomos, said to work only through a just king. 'Excellent polities', required for the establish ment of the imamate of the king, is the pattern of governance of a king who, as the shadow of God, allows each class of men to achieve perfection according to its competence within the social hierarchy. The aged Timurid bureaucrat and historian KhwandamTr took the more Sufi tinged conception of kingship made definitive by the Safavid revolution with him to India, and expressed it in a book commissioned by Babur before his death but dedicated to his suc cessor, Humayun, as 'the unifier of the real and the apparent sovereignty

58 Sanjay Subrahmanyam, 'Iranians abroad: Intra Asian elite migration and early modern
state formation', Journal of Asian Studies, 51, 2 (1992), pp. 342 7.

269

The New Cambridge History of Islam

(jam? i saltanat i haqiqi wa majazT)'. Humayun himself devised a ceremony
with the king like the sun representing the centre of the world while his
officials were divided into twelve orders according to the signs of the zodiac to
represent the rays of light shining to the corners of the empire. 59

Abu '1 Fadl 'Allami, the learned vizier of Akbar (r. 963 1014/1556 1605), was
the architect of his imperial ideology. The key imperial concept was, needless
to say, kingship (padshahT), a gift of God that was not bestowed easily and had
thousands of prerequisites. 'Kingship is a radiance (furugh) from the
Incomparable Dispenser of justice [God] and a ray of the sun, illuminator of
the universe . . . The contemporary language calls it fan i izadi [divine efful
gence], and the tongue of the antiquity calls it kiyan Khurra.' This enabled him to
push the Persian idea of kingship beyond the limits of 'Islamic royalism' to its
logical conclusion as universal (i.e. imperial) monarchy. Akbar was indeed not
merely the 'king of Islam' but 'the emperor (shahanshah) of mankind', as
predestined by the first manifestation of his divine origins, the divine ray of
light that impregnated his legendary Mongolian grandmother, Alanquwa. 60
Needless to say, this universalistic extension of the divine mandate of the
Mughal emperors in no way diluted their Islamic credentials. The coins issued

in Akbar's royal camp (urdu) referred to it as the 'seat of the caliphate (dar al

khilafa)'. Jahangir and Shahjahan were called God's caliph by their high ranking

qadis, as was Aurangzeb, who was also called the commander of the faithful.

As a pantheistic mystic and son of Akbar's spiritual guide, Abu '1 Fadl called

his royal patron the 'perfect man', and may have helped him with the creation of

a special Sufi order of 'divine unity' (tawhid i ilahT), for the officials of which, not

unlike the Safavid order for the Qizilbash amirs, the emperor himself was to be

the supreme spiritual guide. But spiritual guidance of the entire people, who

looked up to him because of his exalted rank, was also one of the king's duties.

As a keen student of all religions Abu '1 Fadl would not hesitate to stipulate

religious tolerance as a prerequisite for one who wishes to attain the exalted

dignity of kingship. Tolerance is almost certainly what he meant by the ambiguous concept of sulh i kuR (peace for all), where 'thousands find rest in

the love of the king, and sectarian differences do not raise the dust of strife'.

59 Khwand Amir, Qanun i Humdyuni, included in Ma'athir al muluk, ed. Mir Hashim
Muhaddith (Tehran, 1372/1993), pp. 247 334.

60 J. F. Richards, 'The formation of imperial authority under Akbar and Jahangir', in
Muzaffar Alam and Sanjay Subrahmanyam (eds.), The Mughal state 1526 lyso (Delhi,
1998), p. 144-

61 Saiyid Athar Abbas Rizvi, Religious and intellectual history of the Muslims in Akhar's reign,
with special reference to Abu'l Fazl, 1556 1605 (New Delhi, 1975), pp. 354 7, 364 (translations
slighdy modified).

Legitimacy and political organisation

Sher Shah Sur (r. 947 52/1540 5), who had dislodged Humayun, came to
power with a platform of justice for the subjects, installed the amir i dad
as
the chief judge of his court of complaints (mazalim), thus following the
Delhi
sultan's importation of that Samanid office as dadbeg. The office
remained
important after the Mughal restoration, though the title was changed
slightly
to mir c adl. Jahangir installed a gold chain in his palace, in imitation of
Anushirwan's legendary 'chain of justice', to assure his constant
accessibility
to his subjects with pleas and petitions against oppression. The didactic
Akhlaq ijahangiri (Jahangirian ethics) by Qadi Nur al Din Khaqani,
versified
into a quatrain an old maxim of statecraft that had, incidentally, been
cited
by the leading Imami jurist in a fatwa that justified the overthrow of the
'Abbasid caliphate by Hiilegu:

Consider justice and equity, not infidelity (kufr) nor religion (din),
That which is at work in the maintenance of the kingdom.
Justice without religion is better for the order of the world
Than the oppression of the pious (dindar) king.

In presenting the massive constitution of Akbar's empire, A 'In i Akbari
(The
Akbarian constitution), Abu '1 Fadl offers the rationale of its division into
three
parts: 'I shall explain the regulations (ayiri) of the household (manzil), the
army
(sipah) and the kingdom (mulk) since these three constitute the work of a
ruler.' 63 The Mughal emperors maintained the distinctively Turco
Mongolian
feature of their mobile court and spent a considerable time outside their
capitals, with the government bureaucracy, treasury and the royal court
of
appeals moving with the royal camp iurdu), which constituted a huge
moving

city. The household regulations included the personal guidance of the officials
by Akbar through initiation into the above mentioned order. This was con
tinued by Jahangir, and was indeed expanded to include the entire body of
high office holders, who were treated as the emperor's disciples and given the
imperial image and seal to wear. As in the Ottoman empire, provincial
administration was absorbed into the military organisation, as was much of
central administration. The highest office holders, the mansabdars, were
appointed on the basis of their personal devotion and loyalty to the ruler, as
indicated by the adoption of the ethos of mamluk tradition of corporate

62 Muzaffar Alam, The languages of -political Islam: India, 1200 1800 (London and Chicago,
2004), p. 73 (translation modified).

63 Quoted in Stephen P. Blake, 'The patrimonial bureaucratic empire of the Mughals',
Journal of Asian Studies, 39, 1 (1979), p. 82 (translation slightly modified).

271

The New Cambridge History of Islam

military slavery, which referred to any officer as 'slave' (banda) of the ruler,
and by the patrimonial ethos of being khanazad (born to the household), both
of which were shared by the Safavids and the Ottomans. A quarter or more of
the state revenue came from the crown lands, and the mansabdar, the lesser
cavalrymen and civil and judicial officials were given land assignments (jaglrs)

for the maintenance of a specific number of men, horses and cavalry, or as
prebends. The jaglrs, treasury and other property of the mansabdars escheated
to the state on their death, though it could be reassigned to a son. Other grants
to landholders (zamindars), whose proportion greatly increased with the
expansion of the Mughal empire into Bengal and the Deccan, were however
much harder to control centrally.

Abu '1 Fadl also organised the Mughal chancery and supplied a model
epistolary manual for it. As the Mughal imperial administration expanded,
administrative manuals (dastur al c amals) multiplied under Jahanshah, and its
intelligence service for reporting local events and developments to the
emperor became more elaborate. Finally, there was an attempt to rationalise
the judicial system alongside bureaucracy, and in 1075/ 1664 Aurangzeb
'Alamgir (world conqueror) ordered Shaykh Nizam of Burhanpur to compile
a book of legal opinions for use by the judges of the empire, and at least
twenty eight jurists working under four section heads produced the practically
oriented Fatawa yi 'Alamgiri (Rulings of the world conqueror), which included
a comprehensive treatment of the law of waqf in fourteen chapters.

The Ottoman, Safavid and Mughal empires are usually put together as early
modern Muslim empires, and Hodgson characterised them as 'gunpowder
empires'. This characterisation exaggerates the importance of military tech
nology and fails to capture the most salient features of these imperial regimes.
A more sociological approach typifies them as 'historical bureaucratic
empires'. 64 Along this line, anticipated by Weber's posthumously published
notes, 65 we have adopted 'patrimonial bureaucratic empire' as the type that
captures the common features of the Ottoman, Safavid and Mughal political
regimes. Despite the development of bureaucracy and its specialisation and
technical rationalisation, the early modern Muslim empires shared a funda

mental feature of earlier patrimonialism: they remained systems of personal
authority through delegation, with the royal court the household of the
ruler at its centre. Our survey of the imperial regimes in this section has been
informed by this model, though it has also shown major differences among

64 S. N. Eisenstadt, Political system of empires (New York, 1969).
65 Weber, Economy and society, vol. II, pp. 1028 44.

Legitimacy and political organisation

the three species of this general type. Many of these differences stem from
variations in the Islamicate cultural heritage. We may conclude, however,
with one major difference regarding the importance of bureaucracy and
degree of centralisation of authority which is linked to the social structure.
The Safavid empire fits the 'patrimonial bureaucratic type' only in the seven
teenth and first quarter of the eighteenth century, and even then the size of the
central bureaucracy was quite modest in comparison to the Ottoman and
Mughal empires (as was the royal palace in Isfahan), and rested largely on the
ad hoc creation of a royal slave corps with the conquest of Georgia. Unlike the
Ottoman and the Mughal empires, the great majority of whose subjects were
sedentary cultivators, the tribal population of Iran remained large and
probably increased when the Ottomans stopped the westward migration
from the steppes and pushed back some of its Anatolian nomadic population
into Iran. Abbas I's impressive feat of centralisation eventually foundered
because of the large size of the nomadic population and its military impor
tance. With the collapse of the Safavid empire in 1135/ 1722 its army and
bureaucracy disintegrated, and when the Qajars came to power with confed

erate tribal military forces at the end of the eighteenth century their govern
ment had only a handful of scribes and tax officials and was entirely patrimonial. However, in the Ottoman and Mughal empires too, central isation was somewhat precarious, as demonstrated by the seventeenth cen
tury with the Jelall rebellions and the rise of the local warlords (aqa, derre beg)
in the Ottoman empire, and with rebellions of the zamindars in the seven teenth and the transformation of Mughal rule beyond the core of the empire
into nominal suzerainty in the eighteenth century.

In conclusion, it should be pointed out that the characterisation of these imperial regimes as 'Oriental despotism', skilfully theorised by Montesquieu
and widely spread by the modern constitutionalist movement in the Muslim
world itself, is misleading. Imperial monarchies were undoubtedly autocratic,
but they were not systems of total power without law. Autocracy was bound
by the public law of the empire /dynasty, and subject to limitation by the sharfa as the law of God. The striking weakness of mechanisms of constitu
tional controls through checks and balances should not obscure the fact that
the sharH ethico legal order created a considerable sphere of civic autonomy
for commercial and civic activities. Although the subject is beyond the scope
of this chapter, the growth of educational and charitable institutions, in particular, made possible by the shaifa's (civil) law of waqf under the 'military
patronage system', continued and was generally accelerated under the 'patrimonial bureaucratic empires'.

273

8

The city and the nomad

HUGH KENNEDY

Cities

The 'Islamic city' has been an important focus of historical discussion for at
least a century; scholars have drawn attention to the importance of cities in
Islamic society, the vast size of certain cities in the medieval Muslim world
and the importance of merchants, not only as generators of wealth but as
religious leaders, intellectuals and exemplars of good and worthy citizens. 1 All
this is in implied contrast with the societies of north west Europe, in which,
it is argued, elite power was based in the countryside and the rural estate
and where cities were comparatively small and merchants regarded with
suspicion and contempt by the upper reaches of both secular and religious
hierarchies. 2

The built environment of the Islamic city also appears to have certain
definable characteristics. The most obvious of these was the apparent absence
of formal planning, the narrow winding streets, the closed off residential
quarters. The main arteries of such a Muslim city were narrow and sometimes
stepped because they were not designed for wheeled vehicles. Medieval
Muslim society almost disinvented the wheel: it was the pack animal and
the human porter that shifted goods, not the cart. 3 This meant that there was
no need for wide, well engineered streets of the sort that Roman towns had
required. The closed residential quarters were a result of the Muslim concern
with the privacy and sanctity of domestic family life, which had to be
protected from prying eyes. With this went the development of a typical

i For a general introduction see A. Hourani and S. M. Stern, Tfie Islamic city: A colloquium
(Oxford, 1970); P. Wheadey, Tfte places where men pray together (Chicago, 2001).

2 S. D. Goitein, 'The rise of the Near Eastern bourgeoisie', Cahiers d'histoire mondiale,
3(i956 7)-

3 R. Bulliet, Tfte camel and tfie wheel (Cambridge, MA, 1975).

274

urban core, the markets grouped around the mosque, with the high status
trades such as textiles and jewellery closest to the centre. 4

The Islamic city, in short, holds an immense attraction for historians of
Islamic culture, primarily because it appears to present a particularly and
distinctively Islamic contribution to civilisation.

It has become a commonplace to note that Islam began as an urban religion.
The Prophet Muhammad was no nomad, but came from the commercial city
of Mecca, a genuinely urban community which had become rich on interna
tional trade. Revisionist historians have cast doubts on the viability and
indeed the very existence of Meccan trade, arguing that so remote and
impoverished an area could never have been the centre of the sort of
commercial networks reported in the early Muslim sources. 5 Recent research,
however, has pointed to the existence of gold and silver mines in the Hijaz at
this period and suggests that the wealth derived from mining precious ores
might have been the generator of the economic expansion of Mecca.

When he left his native city, the Prophet settled in another city, Yathrib,
which became known as al madlna (the city) par excellence. It was from
this city that Muhammad and his successors, the rashidun caliphs, exercised

their authority. In the aftermath of the Muslim conquests new cities were founded to provide places for the soldiers of the Muslim armies and their families to settle. These new towns, the amsar, became the paradigmatic early
Muslim cities. The most famous were Kufa, in central Iraq, Basra in southern
Iraq and Fustat (Old Cairo) in Egypt. The amsar were not simply army cantonments. They were part of a deliberate strategy by the early Muslim elite to settle and control the largely nomad and tribal men who formed the
bulk of the Muslim armies. Above all, they were the centres at which the 'atff,
the pension, was paid in cash to the troops and their families. The presence of
so many people in receipt of regular incomes naturally attracted merchants
and other suppliers of goods and services, and the settlements became fully
fledged cities with the multiplicity of functions normally associated with an
urban environment. The characteristic architectural forms of the commercial
centre seem to have appeared very early: funduqs, lodging and commercial
premises in the markets, are recorded in the second/ eighth century. In the
descriptions of the fourth/tenth century geographers many towns clearly had
bazaars or siiqs with shops in rows, separate streets for each trade, funduqs and

4 H. Kennedy, 'From polis to madina: Urban change in Late Antique and early Islamic
Syria', Past and Present, 106 (1985).

5 P. Crone, Meccan trade and the rise of Islam (Princeton, 1986).

khans for visitors, hammams for all and gates that could be shut at night. The
'classic' form of the Islamic urban markets developed in the first three
centuries of Islam. It took longer for the religious and official architecture to
reach maturity.

Despite the fact that they were founded by government initiative, these
early amsar showed little evidence of formal planning; men tended to settle in
distinct areas with their fellow tribesmen, and gradually replaced their tents or
huts with more permanent structures on the same sites. Only the main
mosque and the Mr al imara (government house) at the centre showed
evidence of formal or monumental architecture.

Other new towns followed in the Umayyad period as Muslims began to
settle in other provinces. In Fars, Shrraz was founded to replace Istakhr and
other cities of Sasanian origin as the main centre of government. In aljazira
Mosul developed into a thriving Muslim city; in Ifriqiya (Tunisia) Qayrawan
was built to provide a base for Arab soldiers from the east at the same time.

In other areas the new Muslim rulers based themselves in existing cities,
although these often expanded to provide new quarters for the new arrivals.
Damascus was the capital of the Umayyad caliphate. The imprint of the new
state was made clear with the construction of a new mosque on the site of the
cathedral and a Mr al imara nearby. The city also expanded a bit to the south
and west of the old walls, but urban growth seems to have been modest for
the capital city of an empire which stretched from the Atlantic to the Indus.
Aleppo, which emerged as the leading city in northern Syria in the first two
centuries of Muslim rule, was also an ancient city which acquired new suburbs
extra muros while remaining centred on its historic core. In the far west and
the far east Muslim rule was exercised from existing urban centres, Cordoba in

al Andalus and Marw in Khurasan: both these cities expanded beyond the previous walled area, Cordoba in the fourth/tenth century, Marw in the second/ eighth.

The reasons for this massive expansion of the larger cities are complex. There is no evidence that new technologies or new crops were developed which allowed people to gather together in larger and more intensive settle
ments. Bulliet has argued that towns in Iran expanded as a result of conversion
to Islam. When men converted to the new religion they abandoned their old
village communities, where they were ostracised, and moved to cities to be
with other Muslims. This may have been the case in some areas, but it is unlikely to be the whole explanation. Cities attracted people because they

6 R. Bulliet, Islam: The view from the edge (New York, 1994).

276

The city and the nomad

offered economic opportunities. The Muslim city was where the court, the
administration and the army were based, and this was where money was spent
and earned.

Cities also expanded because they became the centres of expanding indus
tries. Textile manufacture was the most important industry in the Muslim Middle East and probably the largest provider of employment in most towns.
Textiles were also a major generator to trade links; the Arab geographers constantly refer to the different sorts of textiles produced in different areas. In
the era before artificial fibres, different areas specialised in different crops

linen from Egypt, silk from Armenia depending on climate and agriculture.

This was a society in which rich and elegant woven fabrics were very highly prized. Fine robes formed what was almost an alternative currency, and rulers constantly used them to reward followers and demonstrate rank. The Abbasid court of the second/eighth and third/ninth centuries was a massive purchaser and consumer of fabrics from Armenia in the north and Khuzistan in the south. In both areas this demand stimulated manufacture, urban life and trade and transport. Sometimes these fabrics were woven at state run tiraz workshops, but many were probably purchased from independent artisans. Large numbers of men must have been engaged in transporting the finished products, and this had a major impact on local economies, stimulating growth. The decline in urban life in Khuzistan from the fourth/ tenth century onwards may well have been a result of the collapse of the 'Abbasid caliphate and the disappearance of the most important customer for their manufactured goods.

The new Muslim government shaped the distribution of cities in many ways. In the lands of the old Sasanian empire we can observe how cities that became the centres of government tended to thrive and often expand very greatly. Other small provincial towns gradually declined and lost their urban status. Thus Nishapur vastly increased in size after the Tahirids adopted it as the seat of government in the third/ninth century, and the scattered settlements of the Isfahan oasis were brought into a single urban nucleus by a governor in the second half of the second/ eighth century while the other settlements of the oasis were reduced to village status. In Fars the Islamic new town of ShTraz flourished and expanded while older centres such as Istakhr and Bishapur lost their urban character.

The greatest city founded in the early Islamic period was of course

Baghdad, begun by al Mansur in 145/762. 7 Here, where the courses of the
Tigris and Euphrates come closest together, he built a new city which was to

7 J. Lassner, The topography of Baghdad in the early Middle Ages (Detroit, 1970).

be the centre of his government. He and his engineers constructed the official
core, the heavily fortified Round City with the mosque and palace at its centre.
The caliph also entrusted his most loyal servants, notably the hajib al Rabi' ibn
Yunus, with laying out the mosques and suqs. The units of the army were
given plots of land to build houses on outside the walls of the Round City, and
a few years later the caliph's son and heir, al Mahdi, constructed a new quarter
for his own supporters on the east bank of the Tigris.

Baghdad was founded as an administrative capital, but the presence of the
court and the army meant that it soon became a major commercial city as
suppliers of goods and services crowded in to take advantage of the markets.
Because it stood at the head of what was still the richest area of agricultural
land in the world, the alluvial lands of the Sawad of southern Iraq, and because
it lay at the centre of a network of waterways, the growth of the city was not
constrained by problems of food supply, and the population may well have
reached half a million by the beginning of the third/ninth century. Very little

of this growth was planned in any formal sense, though some markets were

laid out by government officials and speculators. In one sense the develop

ment of the city was a gigantic property speculation, designed to enrich the

new elite of soldiers and officials who were granted land, but it also became a

vibrant and successful city in its own right. When the capital was moved to

Samarra 1 in the 220s/ 830s, Baghdad showed that it could still flourish without

the presence of the government apparatus.

Samarra' was founded for much the same reasons as Baghdad: to house
the new, largely Turkish, army recruited by the caliph al Mu'tasim and to
reward the supporters of his regime. The city was further expanded by
al Mutawakkil, who erected what was essentially another new palace quarter

at the northern end of the site. The ruins of Samarra 3 can still be seen today,

stretched out along the east bank of the Tigris. This was a measure of the lack

of success of the city, which dwindled almost to nothingness when the
government left to return to Baghdad in 279/892. The failure of Samarra'
was due to a number of factors: the gravelly plateau on which it was built
prevented the development of the systems of canals which made Baghdad

look almost Venetian; the distance from the Euphrates meant that grain could

not easily be imported from the steppes of aljazrra, while the Sawad was
further away down the swift flowing course of the Middle Tigris. Vast
amounts of money were spent by the caliphs in attempts to bring water to

C. F. Robinson, A medieval Islamic city reconsidered: An interdisciplinary
approach to Samarra
(Oxford, 2001); T. Leisten, Excavation of Samarra, volume I: Architecture
(Mainz, 2003).

278

the city, but without effect. The contrasting fates of Samarra 3 and Baghdad
help us to understand something of the role of Muslim governments in the
creating of new cities: they could provide a nucleus of attraction, but the
long term viability of any city depended on more general geographical
and economic factors. The mute ruins of Madrnat al Zahra', Sultaniyya and
Fatehpur Sikri all show the consequences of failure; the bustle of Cairo and
Isfahan the long lasting effects of success.

The model of Baghdad had a lasting influence on the formation of new
capitals in the Muslim world. In Egypt the original misr at Fustat was supple
mented by a series of military settlements, which culminated in the Fatimid
capital of Cairo, laid out in a large walled rectangle to the north of the existing
cities, another example of an official city, dominated by palaces and the
mosque (Azhar). 9 After the collapse of Fatimid rule Cairo, like Baghdad,
continued to thrive as an economic and cultural centre. It also remained the
capital of the Mamluk sultanate, perhaps the most powerful and stable state in
the later medieval Islamic world. Mamluk sultans and amirs spent vast sums
on creating religious institutions and monuments for themselves in the heart
of the city.

In much of the medieval world cities were defined and limited by city walls.
In the early Islamic Middle East, however, city walls were in many cases
dispensed with so that settlement could develop without the restrictions
imposed by a fortified perimeter. The new amsar at Kufa, Basra and Fustat
seem to have been unwalled, at least in their early formative period. In
existing fortified cities the Muslims and other immigrants usually settled in
open areas outside the walls. In Marw 10 the city expanded to the west in the
lands irrigated by the Majan canal, and it was here that Abu Muslim con

strutted his famous Aar al imam. This new elite quarter was unfortified while
the great rectangular enclosure of the old city with its ancient citadel and
massive mud brick ramparts became gradually depopulated or given over to
industrial use. In Nishapur the old fortress was abandoned as the mosques and
markets were constructed well outside the protection of its walls. In Aleppo
the settlements of the Arabs and the palaces of the Hamdanids lay outside the
walls to the south of the city. In Cordoba in the fourth/tenth century the new
residential areas spread far beyond the walls to the west. This apparent
disregard for physical security was reflected in the fact that sieges of towns
were rare and that military dominance was usually secured in battles between

9 S.J. Staffa, Conquest and fusion: The social evolution of Cairo AD 642
1850 (Leiden, 1977).
10 G. Herrmann, The monuments ofMerv (London, 1999).

279

field armies in open terrain: military leaders were often reluctant to cramp
their armies inside fortifications.

With the coming of the Saljuqs in the late fifth/ eleventh century we can
begin to see the development of the urban citadel as a prominent feature of
the townscape of the Islamic city. Wherever possible these citadels were built
on high ground overlooking the city, and were protected by thick walls and
massive towers. In Marw a citadel was constructed and the new quarters

surrounded by a wall in the late fifth/ eleventh century. At the same time
Damascus acquired a citadel for the first time, and this was rebuilt and
added
to throughout the sixth/twelfth and seventh/thirteenth centuries. Cairo
had
to wait until the late sixth/twelfth century to be endowed with a citadel
by
Saladin, greatly strengthened by al Malik al Adil and, as at Marw, this
was
accompanied by the building of walls to enclose previously open areas of
settlement. In al Andalus at the same time the skylines of the developing
cities
of Granada and Badajoz were dominated by their citadels. These new
style
citadels usually enclosed a place for the governor or ruler and barracks
or
places for the military to pitch their tents, and the emergence of the
fortified
enceinte reflects the status of the amir and his l askar (army) or shihna
(police
force), ruling the city but in many ways separate from the citizens and
their
lives. In Damascus a palace of modest size occupied part of the area; in
Granada the citadel expanded in the eighth/fourteenth century to enclose
the palace city known as the Alhambra.

The period from the sixth/twelfth to the ninth/fifteenth centuries might
be
described as the classic period of the Islamic city, a period which, thanks
to the
works of Lapidus and others, has come to appear normative for all other
Islamic cities. This was not a period of great urban planning projects.
Even in
Timur's Samarqand, where massive buildings were undertaken, there
was no
grand design for the city. The Mamluks in Cairo and Damascus were
great
builders of mosques and mausolea, but they did not attempt to reshape
the
urban environment with squares and avenues. Instead, this middle period
saw
the development of a number of different types of monumental structure
with
which the elite sought to establish their imprint on the city. There were
mosques of course. In this case the patrons constructed small
neighbourhood
mosques or added to and embellished more established ones, with new
minarets or mihrabs. Urban space intra muros, for all cities were now
walled,

meant that land was at a premium; architects had to use all their ingenuity to
contrive great buildings. Madrasas were another characteristic of the city,
showing its learning and preserving the traditions of the scholars who had
come before and who formed the intellectual and religious capital of the city.

280

The city and the nomad

Finally there were the mausolea where the great dead lay, often attached to
madrasas or mosques.

From the tenth/sixteenth century much of the Muslim world was ruled by
three great empires: the Ottoman, the Safavid and the Mughal. All three were
great builders. In Istanbul the urban scene was transformed by the creation of
great complexes such as the Suleymaniye in which the mosque was sur
rounded by a large court and a number of service buildings, libraries and
hospitals which virtually created a city within the city. The street plan,
however, evolved naturally from the Roman and Byzantine plan which
underlay it. In Isfahan, by contrast, the Safavid Shah 'Abbas I and his successors
laid out a city on a scale which had had no parallels since Fatimid Cairo, six
centuries before. A vast new maydan (square) was laid out at the edge of the
old walled city, with a congregational mosque, a smaller mosque and the
entrance to the palace quarter, where elegant pavilions stood in beautiful
gardens. There was also a broad, straight street, the Chahar Bagh, running
through gardens to the river, which was itself crossed by elegant bridges. The
whole project was on a scale and regular planning which had no equal in the

Muslim world, but the contemporary Uzbek rulers of Samarqand completed a
third madrasa which transformed the open space of the Registan into one of
the great urban spaces of the Muslim world.

The best surviving urban layout from the Mughal empire is the largely
deserted city of Fatehpur Sikri. This was built slightly before Isfahan,
between 874/1470 and 994/1585 at the command of the emperor Akbar.
Unlike Isfahan, this was not a royal quarter added to a thriving existing city,
but a largely new creation whose original focus was the shrine of SalTm
Chishti (883 980/1479 1572) a Sufi saint who is said to have predicted the
birth of Akbar' s sons. The site was along a ridge overlooking a lake, and the
city was divided into two zones: an official quarter comprising the great
mosque with its vast courtyard; and the palace. The palace had a number of
courts, each more secluded than the last, from the public Divani Am to the
sequestered harem. Outside the official quarter, and orientated at a different
angle, were the commercial buildings that served the complex, a long bazaar
with a central dome, a caravanserai and a mint or factory. The whole was
enclosed by stone walls 11 kilometres long, beyond which lay gardens and
residences for the nobility. Fatehpur Sikri never throve as a city. As at
Samarra 5 , the departure of the ruler, in 994/1585, spelled the end of its
prosperity; but, again like Samarra', the failure of the city to develop a self
sustaining urban life has preserved the vision of urban development down
to the present day.

281

The New Cambridge History of Islam

The expansion of Islam also brought the expansion of urban life in areas

where cities had been virtually non existent before. With the exceptions of
Volubilis and Ceuta, Morocco at the time of the Islamic conquest seems to
have been almost deurbanised. The first real cities to develop were Fez, from
the late second/ eighth century, which was a dynastic and government centre
and home to refugees from al Andalus, and Sijilmasa, a trading emporium in
the south on the fringes of the Sahara. Urbanism received a major boost with
the founding of Marrakesh in the 460s /1070s when the Almoravid rulers
sought to settle their Sanhaja nomad followers north of the Atlas Mountains.
Under the Almohads who succeeded them, Marrakesh became the capital of a
large empire, and a centre of learning. Meanwhile the Almohads founded
Rabat as a military base for expeditions against the Christians of al Andalus.
The nomads who supported the Almoravids and the village dwellers who
sustained the Almohads both used and created cities to exercise their power.

Saharan trade led to the creation of cities on the fringes of the Muslim
world. Along the Niger river, Muslim merchants created cities such as Jenne
and Timbuktu, and made them seats of learning.

The 'Islamic city 1 has become something of an academic cliche, a useful
tool of argument but difficult to define. What was distinctive about this city?
The most obvious features were certain distinctive public buildings. The
mosque, especially in the early days of Islam, was both place of worship and
community centre for the Muslim population of a town, providing housing for
teachers and their classes and the court of the qadi. From the fifth/ eleventh
century madrasas and mausolea began to appear in the city, and by the late
Middle Ages urban centres from Delhi to Timbuktu were dominated by the
domes and minarets of these buildings. The commercial centres of Islamic
cities were also distinctive, the long narrow suqs of the Arabic speaking world
and the characteristic crossroad bazaar (charsu) of the eastern Iranian world

marked them out. Islamic cities were also distinguished by the separation of
commercial and residential areas: there was no tradition of living above the
shop, and the suqs were usually closed and deserted at night. Most Islamic
cities too shared the tradition of secluded residential quarters, sometimes
gated, with narrow cul de sac lanes leading to blank walled houses which
looked inward on their courtyards; it was very different from the public,
sometimes ostentatious, housing of the western city.

At first sight, the hand of government rested lightly on the Islamic city.
There might be grand urban projects such as the Safavid development at
Isfahan and the Mughal city of Fatehpur Sikri, but little attempt was made to
plan commercial and residential areas. However, the role of government was

282

The city and the nomad

crucial to the functioning of the city. The Islamic world inherited and main
tained a system of public finances, a system with no parallel in the west, where
public taxation had collapsed with the Roman empire. Governments collected
money and paid salaries in cash. Where the government and its employees
lived, there was an active market and people flocked to provide goods and
services for the salarymen. More than anything else, the fiscal role of the state
ensured the continued vitality of urban life in the Islamic Middle East when it
effectively disappeared in north west Europe and the Byzantine empire. This
fiscal structure was itself part of the din, part of the faith of the Muslims, and

perhaps it was in this way that the Islamic city really was a product of the
religious environment in which it flourished.

Nomads

If there is one feature of the human geography of the Muslim world in the pre
modern period which distinguishes it from that of western Europe, India or
China it is surely the presence of large numbers of nomadic or transhumant
peoples. The impact of the nomads has been enormous sometimes destruc
tive, sometimes leading to the formation of major states and empires. This
impact can be seen in their establishment and support of important states,
their influence on political systems and patterns and their dominance of the
battlefield.

Nomads and transhumants can be grouped together because they move
their dwellings and live in tents. They are also, practically without exception,
dependent on animals sheep, goats, camels and horses for their survival.
Despite these common characteristics, different groups have very different
historical roles.

True nomads have traditionally lived in three major geographical areas: the
deserts of Arabia and Syria, the steppes of Central Asia and the Sahara desert in
Africa. Each of these populations created major states in the Muslim world.
The first Muslim conquests were successful because of the military experience
and abilities of the Arab nomads of the Arabian Peninsula; the steppes of
Central Asia provided the manpower for the Saljuq and Mongol imperial
armies; and the Sahara nomads created the short lived but extensive empire of
the Almoravids. These nomad populations can be grouped according to the
animals they lived off, the camels and sheep in the Arabian and Syrian deserts,
camels in the Sahara and horses of the Central Asian steppes. In the deserts of

Syria and Arabia there is a further distinction between breeders of sheep, who
need access to water and markets and so have to keep near settled lands, and

breeders of camels, who can roam wider in the inner desert. Many tribes, of
course, raised both.

Nomad populations formed the military manpower of many Islamic
states in the pre modern period. The most extensive and spectacular were
the Mongols, only partly Muslim, whose imperialism was based on the
support of the horse nomads of the central Asian steppes. The early Saljuqs
too were dependent on their nomad followers, though in a development
repeated elsewhere, the nomads were soon marginalised and replaced by
professional ghulam soldiers, often of Turkish stock but paid and recruited as
regular troops. The remaining nomads, generally known in the sources as
Turkmen, were allowed to roam in the steppe lands of Iran and Anatolia and
came to form a dangerous political challenge as the power of the Saljuq rulers
waned in the sixth/twelfth century: it was an army of Turkmen like this who
captured and humiliated Sultan Sanjar, the last great Saljuq ruler, near Marw
in 553/1157.

Transhumants were the dominant pastoral people in a wide swath of
territory which ran around the edge of the Fertile Crescent from the Taurus
mountains of south eastern Anatolia, along the Zagros ranges which divide
the Iranian Plateau from Iraq and south to the mountains of Fars along

the eastern shores of the Gulf. There were also transhumant groups in the
mountains of Azerbaijan and the steppes at the south east corner of the
Caspian. Transhumants followed established roads from the winter pastures
in the plains to the high summer grazing lands. They lived in tents but their
chiefs sometimes built bridges to help them pass the most rapid streams so
that the tribesmen could pay their respects to the tomb towers of their dead
leaders en route. The transhumants were mostly Kurdish speaking in the early
Islamic period, but by the end of the fifth/ eleventh century they had been
joined and in some cases replaced by Turkish speakers.

Transhumants usually existed on the margins of mainstream politics, and
there are no examples of transhumant people creating major empires. They
did, however, create small states at times of general political fragmentation.
One such was in the fourth /tenth century after the breakup of the Abbasid
caliphate when dynasties such as the Marwanids of Mayyafariqin in south
eastern Anatolia and the Hasanuyids and 'Annazids of the Zagros were based
on transhumant Kurdish tribes. The rulers may have exercised power from
their small town capitals or strategic fortresses but the manpower of their
armies lay in their pastoral followers.

The Ilkhanid empire, the Mongol successor state in Iran, was also trans
humant on a larger scale. The khans would spend the summer months in the

284

The city and the nomad

high pastures of Azerbaijan, around Ujjan and Tabriz. In the winter they

would either move north to the low lying Qarabagh steppes of the south west
corner of the Caspian Sea, or through the Zagros passes to Iraq. If the rulers
were feeling more adventurous, they might travel up the Euphrates to ravage
the lands of northern Syria. It is clear that the political geography of the
Ilkhanid state and the ambitions of its rulers were almost entirely guided by
the needs of their pastoral, transhumant followers.

Both nomads and transhumants were grouped in tribes. The definition of
the tribe, which has numerous descriptive terms in Arabic, is complex. In the
literature and lore of the Middle East the tribes have a clearly defined self
image: they purport to be the descendants of a common ancestor. There is
supposed to be, in fact, a biological rationale for their existence as a group. In
reality, however, the position was much more complex. Some tribes clearly
were part of extended kinship structures, others were little more than genea
logical fictions created to define groups of pastoralists who acted together in a
common purpose. The tribes of pre Islamic Arabia, who form the archetype of
later Islamic tribal groups, were central to the success of the early Muslim
conquests. In the second/ eighth century their genealogies were elaborated
and written up in prodigious detail, with thousands of names supposedly
arranged in their correct places. This erudition certainly gave a spurious clarity
to the question of nomad descent.

The large tribes of pre Islamic Arabia seldom came together as a group. For
the purposes of everyday life the much smaller tenting group was the normal
unit for moving and decision making. Perhaps paradoxically, the Muslim
conquests brought members of tribes together as never before. Settlement
in the amsar, designed in part to reduce the influence of tribes and tribal
leaders, actually had the opposite effect: members of, say, Tamim (a tribe from
north east Arabia which settled in Iraq in large numbers), who had never

previously worked or lived together now found themselves living together in
close proximity and competing for government resources with rival tribes.
Tribal solidarities and rivalries were built up and became a significant factor in
the politics of the Umayyad and early 'Abbasid caliphates.

Nomad societies have very different attitudes to the ownership and use of
wealth from those of their settled neighbours. Among nomads it is, of course,
moveable property, especially livestock, that forms the true valuable prop
erty. Some leaders may have larger and more beautiful tents than their fellow
tribesmen, but these are a sign of status rather than disposable assets. Many
nomads in the Arabian and Syrian deserts also own agricultural lands and even
urban properties in the areas on the fringes of the desert. The income from

285

The New Cambridge History of Islam

such properties may boost their status among their fellows to some extent and
give them political leverage, but it can never be the foundation of their wealth.
In the fourth/tenth and early fifth/ eleventh centuries, when the influence of
nomads in the Fertile Crescent reached a high point, the leaders who founded
the small states of the time used the income from urban properties and
subsidies from settled powers to establish the leadership within their tribes
without which they could never have created lasting polities.

The livestock of the nomad constitute his true wealth, and such wealth
creates its own limitations. A large flock brings prestige and the resources to

entertain on a grand scale, but it is also self limiting. Any number of dinars can
be stored up in a palace vault, but flocks cannot be extended exponentially:
there will not be enough grazing for them; if they are entrusted to other
shepherds to take them away to new pastures, they will be impossible to
control and will inevitably disperse and disappear.

Attitudes to land ownership were very different in many nomad societies
from those held among settled peoples. Among the settled peoples of the
Middle East, land was the major source of wealth. The urban bureaucratic and
military elites sometimes owned it and took rents; more often they held the
rights to collect government taxes on the land, the iqtd\ suyurgkal or any of the
numerous other terms used to describe this. Whether held in direct owner
ship, or as iqta\ the land needed to be surveyed and recorded; farmers needed
to be settled on it and encouraged to stay, for land without workers was
valueless. Landholders were encouraged to care for and develop their proper
ties. In some areas, Iraq and aljazira in Umayyad times, Syria in Mamluk
times, the government and its representatives invested in improving the land
and the agricultural base.

For the 'pure' nomad, land represents grazing opportunities. Grazing was
the essential fuel of the nomad life and the most important desideratum of
nomad armies. The grazing had no boundaries save those imposed by natural
conditions, and artificial borders were merely obstacles. So too were the
inhabitants, with their inconvenient habits of putting up buildings and walls
and digging ditches across the land. For the nomad the land was more use
unpeopled.

Of course this contrast is in a sense artificial and the differences far too
sharply drawn to be realistic. In many Middle Eastern societies, as has already
been noted, nomad chiefs owned landed estates, and no doubt cultivated and
improved them like everyone else. The clearest examples of the different
priorities of nomads and settled peoples come from Iran and Turkistan after

the Mongol invasions. The mass slaughter of the inhabitants of the settled

The city and the nomad

lands and the destruction of irrigation systems should be seen, in part at least, as a reflection of the need for pasture, a rational use of resources. The
differing attitudes are clearly reflected in texts on good government, such as the Siyasatnama of Nizam al Mulk in which care of the peasants, to persuade them to stay and make the land productive, is urged on the Saljuq
rulers. Even clearer is Rashid al Din's life of Ghazan Khan, essentially a mirror
for princes, which purports to describe Ghazan's efforts to force and persuade
his nomad followers to adopt a more constructive and sustainable attitude to
landholding.

High status in such a nomad society depends not on numbers of beasts but
on various forms of social capital, above all on the ability to entertain and reward. The generosity of nomads is often commented on by travellers, and
the feeding and lodging of strangers is one of the hallmarks of Bedouin society.
The obligations of hospitality were widely recognised in the society and, to an
extent, formalised in custom. Hospitality has an essential function in the exercise of leadership: a reputation for generosity brings guests from far and
wide to a man's tent, and guests bring with them information. They bring news of raids, alliances and, probably most important of all, news of grazing
opportunities. The man who entertains the most guests is the man who is best
informed and able to make the best decisions for his followers.

Leadership in many nomad societies is very different from monarchy as it
developed among the settled peoples of the Islamic world. Leadership among
many tribes is both hereditary and elective. Chiefs are usually chosen from
a ruling kin, an extended family which embraces brothers and first cousins
and sometimes a more extended group than that. Son may succeed father,
but there is no presumption in favour of hereditary succession and, even
in the case of hereditary succession, there is no natural preference for
primogeniture.

Within this kin, the most able individual is selected by the kin itself and
the wider group. The qualities they are looking for will certainly include
courage in battle and ability as a military leader, but wider social skills are
also important. These will include being a good and fair arbitrator and settler
of disputes, and being able to make wise decisions about economic choices:
where to find good grazing, which markets to visit. The chosen leader has to
work in cooperation with the other members of the kin. The more prominent
members of his family will expect that their advice will be heeded and that
they will have a share of both the responsibilities and the rewards of power.

The chief has no coercive power to enforce his authority: it can only be
exercised by consent and the pressure of popular opinion. In the case of

criminal or other individuals who transgress the boundaries of tribal custom, it
will be this popular opinion that forces the individual to conform or leave. The

leader has no power to force his followers into battle if they have no confidence in his military abilities.

This means that in most nomad societies the powers of the leader are severely circumscribed, and rulership is based on consent; but not all nomad
societies are the same. Among the Mongols of Central Asia a different form of
leadership can be seen. Chinggis Khan became supreme because of his abilities
as a conqueror, which meant that men were eager to follow him. However,
unlike an Arab Bedouin chief, he demanded and received absolute obedience;
those who hesitated or wavered were brutally punished, and Chinggis can be
seen as the nomad chief as absolute ruler.

The nomad model of more or less consensual rulership exercised by a ruling kin was extremely influential in many areas and periods of Islamic history. The Umayyads and early 'Abbasids were certainly not nomadic, but
both dynasties shared power among the ruling kin. It was not until the third/
ninth century that the 'Abbasids ceased to rely on the extended family as one
of the mainstays of the dynasty and turned instead to professional soldiers and
administrators. The early days of Saljuq rule in Iran saw tension between the
idea of power sharing among the ruling kin espoused by Qutulmush when he
challenged Alp Arslan' s right to succeed in 455/1063. It was also a protest
against the more authoritarian and statist policy of Alp Arslan who began the
recruitment of ghilman to provide an alternative power base. The rebellion
was supported by many Turkmen. In the aftermath the Turkmen were encouraged to move to Anatolia and engage the Byzantines, while Alp Arslan continued to recruit ghilman and establish a monarchy based on a professional army. It is a classic example of a dynasty brought to power by
nomads in one generation and then breaking with its supporters in the next.

The military superiority of nomads and soldiers of nomad stock was a fact of life through much of Islamic history. It was above all their ability as

horsemen that assured this mastery. The armies of the early Islamic conquests
had largely fought on foot, though they had used horses and camels to reach
the battlefield. From the third/ninth centuries, however, horsemen, usually of
Turkish origin, came to form the core of most Muslim armies. It was at this
time too that the mounted archer became the key elite soldier. The demands
of firing arrows from a swiftly moving horse mean that it can only be achieved
by men who have been practising it from childhood. The triumph of the
mounted archer may have been assisted by the adoption of stirrups in
the Middle East in around 81/700. The young Turkish nomad, who could

288

The city and the nomad

often ride before he could walk, was best placed to take advantage of this
technology.

From the third/ninth to the tenth/ sixteenth centuries the Turkish horse
man was master of the battlefield. Mongol warriors comprised the most
effective armies that had ever been seen in the Muslim east. Early Fatimid
rule in North Africa and Egypt was sustained by the Kutama Berber nomads
of North Africa, although these were largely replaced by Turks during the
course of the fifth/ eleventh century. In al Andalus, the Sanhaja Berbers who
supported the Almoravids were able to defeat the Christian forces at the battle
of Zallaqa (479/1086).

The military dominance of the nomads faltered in the early tenth /sixteenth
century. This can be seen most clearly in the struggle between the Ottomans

and the Safavids in eastern Anatolia. The Safavid forces were largely recruited
among the Turkmen Qizilbash of eastern Anatolia and they fought as they had always done, as nomad warriors with sword and bow. The Ottoman army
was altogether more organised. In the crucial battle of Chaldiran in 920/1514
Ottoman professionalism and Ottoman cannon completely defeated the Safavid forces. Three years later the Ottoman mastery of artillery may have
played a part in the defeat of the Egyptian Mamluks.

The use of gunpowder weapons gave an important advantage to the settled
peoples. The traditional bows of the nomads could be made in camp from materials (bone, glue) that were essentially animal by products, swords could
also be easily purchased. The production of cannon and handguns, on the other hand, needed resources of iron and fuel, not to speak of expertise, which
were simply impossible in the nomad camp.

It could be argued that the nomad domination of the battlefields of the Middle East lasted from the introduction of stirrups and mounted archery in
the second/eighth and third/ninth centuries to the arrival of effective gun powder weapons in the tenth/ sixteenth. In fact, of course, it was not as clear
cut as that. The introduction of firearms did not always mean that they were
used effectively and to good purpose. The Safavid empire, which certainly had
firearms technology, was defeated and brought down in 1135/ 1722 by the
Ghilzai Afghans, who were still essentially nomads. As late as the thir teenth/nineteenth century the Tekke Turkmen of the Marw oasis were able
to raid the settled lands of Iran with virtual impunity, looting property and
capturing unfortunate Persian villagers. In the Syrian desert and Arabia, Bedouin were still a threat to the fringes of the Ottoman empire (and the Hijaz railway) until the first decades of the twentieth century.

289

9

Rural life and economy until 1800

ANDREW M. WATSON

Diversity

The lives of sedentary people in the Islamic countryside unfolded in a multi
faceted context. Natural, technological, economic, political, cultural and religious
factors all bore on rural life, and were in turn affected by it.

The natural world provided a backdrop of topography, soils, climate and
water, while technologies offered tools, irrigation devices, plants, animals and
rotations. Economic factors such as population densities, urbanisation, mon
etisation of the economy and long distance trade further conditioned the
activities of agriculturists, as did the policies of governments concerning
security, land tenure, inheritance, water rights, taxation and the construction
and maintenance of irrigation works. Cultural biases showed in preferences
for different modes of settlement and production, as well as in diets, and both
political and cultural elements were informed by religious teachings. None of
these was a constant.

Not surprisingly there was much variation in agricultural activities over
time and space. To give just one example, Vincent Lagardere has identified
seven types of agricultural undertakings in Islamic Spain, each the product of a
particular situation. These are as follows: (i) the munya, an aristocratic estate
generally located near large cities, and as much pleasure garden as farm,
where year round irrigation supported orchards and intensive cultivation;
(2) the rahal, a small aristocratic estate, probably resulting from the distribu

tion of confiscated lands to people of high rank, generally located further from
cities and containing irrigated land, which was heavily cropped, and rain fed
land, mainly given over to olive trees and vines; (3) the janna, or small irrigated
orchard and market garden, often located near towns and owned by town
dwellers, typically operated for pleasure and profit by the owners and their
families, sometimes with the help of hired labour; (4) the qarya, usually a
village of around ten to thirty families, who generally owned their farmlands

Rural life and economy until 1800

but might be the sharecroppers of a great person, producing a wide range of
crops on both irrigated and un irrigated lands; (5) the day'a, a large estate with
a single owner, which with the help of sharecroppers or hired labourers
produced both crops and animals; (6) the majshar, a privately owned estate
devoted to the production of livestock in hilly and mountainous areas
unsuited to crop production; and (7) other communities specialised in the
raising of animals in marshy or well watered areas along river basins. 1

If one looks beyond Spain to other parts of the early Islamic world one
encounters still more variation, but this is strikingly limited in scope. Two
types of settlement inherited from Antiquity are notably absent from the
above list for Spain, but were found elsewhere. One of these is the larger farms
along river valleys, where seasonal irrigation allowed the production of crops
for subsistence and for sale, the labour being most often provided by share
croppers. The other, found in many regions, is a community practising mixed,
but hardly integrated, farming: most of its members grew crops, but they also

entrusted flocks to shepherds for grazing on near or more distant pastures.

These appear to complete the list of early Islamic modes of production. That these same types repeat themselves all over the early Islamic world; that they appear to have been the only types of agricultural undertakings in early Islamic times; and that they persisted well into modern times, by which time several new types of undertakings had appeared, calls for an explanation.

Uniformity

This would suggest that the repetition of the same patterns over vast spaces and long periods of time was the result of several inherited or emerging commonalities: similarities in the natural environments in which agriculture was practised; the region's common heritage of agricultural technologies developed in the ancient world; the changes wrought all over this world by its Arab conquerors; and finally, during the first four centuries of Islam, the massive diffusion from east to west of crops, farming techniques and irrigation technologies, which further unified agricultural practice.

The physical environment of the early Islamic world, though extremely varied, allowed agriculture in very limited areas. Normally, dry farming could be successful only where rainfall was above 250 millimetres per year; typically, annual rainfall in cultivated areas was between 300 and 400 millimetres, but in

1 Vincent Lagardere, Campagnes et paysans d'alAndalus, VHIe XVe siecles (Paris, 1993), passim.

291

a few places it was as high as 700 millimetres. Nearly all the rain fell in the
autumn, winter and early spring, allowing only a single agricultural season.
The hot, dry summer was almost dead. Where rainfall was adequate, top
ography might not be: crops could be grown only on plains and on the slopes
of hills and mountains that had retained enough soil to permit terracing;
uncultivable areas, in the plains and on mountain slopes, might be used for
seasonal grazing of animals. If irrigation water was available, this could be
used to increase the productivity of rain fed areas and to support agriculture in
areas with inadequate rainfall: along river valleys, around oases and in places
where wells or underground canals gave access to ground water.

To exploit the possibilities of this difficult environment a common body of
agricultural knowledge and practice had emerged in ancient times, and was
inherited by the conquering Arabs. Uniformity was particularly striking in the
Mediterranean basin, where Phoenicians, Greeks, Romans and finally
Byzantines had diffused tools, crops and practices over wide areas, so that
by the seventh century CE there could be found almost everywhere the same
ways of coping with environmental challenges. Generally, rain fed lands were
planted with drought resistant permanent crops, such as olive trees, fig trees
and vines, or they were sown bi annually with winter grains, mostly wheat,
barley and millets, as well as winter pulses such as chickpeas, lentils, peas and
broad beans. In alternate years cultivated lands were fallowed to replenish
moisture and fertility. On irrigated lands a wider range of crops was grown,
including fruits, vegetables and, in warmer areas, date palms. Biennial fallow
ing was usually suppressed in favour of annual cropping on irrigated land;

sometimes, but rarely, two crops were produced in one year. Depending on
the region and the type of undertaking, some large animals might be raised,
commonly sheep, goats, cattle, camels, horses, mules and donkeys. But in
general the production of animals and the growing of crops were two distinct
activities, carried out by different people on different types of land. There was
no trace of the integrated (or mixed) farming of medieval Europe, in which the
same land and labour were used to produce both crops and large animals.

In the valleys of the Tigris and Euphrates, as well as in the Indus Valley,
some differences from Mediterranean practices are noteworthy in pre Islamic
times: most particularly in irrigation, which in some places allowed a summer
season, and in range of crops, which included some plants, such as sorghum
and rice, diffused out of India. But to a remarkable degree, even in these
distant regions, a 'Mediterranean' mode of agriculture prevailed.

In the regions they conquered the Arabs were in many ways a unifying
force. Their armies and the settlers who came in their wake brought the

292

Arabic language, which was the language of Islam and was almost everywhere
to become the language of government, of learning and, in many places, of
vernacular discourse, thus encouraging the development of a common culture
throughout dar al islam. And they brought a new religion. Though the Qur'an
seems to have a low regard for sedentary rural people and their work, Islam

offered teachings and developed legal traditions which bore on agriculture in
important ways. Islam forbade the eating of pork and the drinking of wine,
proscriptions which banished pigs from the farmyards of Muslims and greatly
reduced but did not eliminate their making and drinking of wine. Legal
traditions included laws of inheritance which decreed how estates, including
agricultural properties, should be divided among heirs; there might be a great
many inheritors, resulting in the extreme fragmentation of farms or else their
continued exploitation as a single property jointly owned, but poorly man
aged, by many absentee landlords. There developed a complex and bewilder
ing body of tax laws explaining how different categories of rural people, lands,
crops and animals should be taxed. There were also rules concerning rights
over irrigation water, including the proscription of its sale; these rights
undoubtedly encouraged investment in irrigation. And there were teachings
and laws concerning the ownership of land, which, depending on circum
stances and jurist, was seen to belong to God, to the state, to the Muslim
community, to institutions and to individuals. Although in time different
schools of law emerged with somewhat different rules concerning taxation
and the ownership of land, and although realities increasingly diverged from
the teachings of jurists, at least in the early centuries Islamic law contributed
significantly to the uniformity of rural life across the Islamic world.

Further homogenisation of agriculture occurred in the first four centuries
of Islam through the widespread diffusion of old and new technologies. The
principal direction of flow was from the eastern part of the caliphate the Sind
and the valleys of the Tigris and Euphrates to the Mediterranean basin.
These were regions that in earlier times had had little contact but which, as a
result of the Arab conquests, were brought under a single rule. Over the
length and breadth of this world there was much travel by pilgrims, scholars,
merchants, fighters and settlers, who carried the agricultural knowledge and
food preferences of their homelands to new places. Among the crops diffused

westwards were rice, sorghum, sugar cane, cotton, various citrus trees (Seville
oranges, lemons, limes and shaddocks), bananas, plantains, watermelons,
spinach, aubergines, colocasia, mango trees and coconut palms. With the
exception of mango trees and coconut palms, which could be grown only in
tropical or semi tropical zones, these new crops were diffused to all regions of

293

The New Cambridge History of Islam

the early Islamic world and many became economically important. One
irrigation technology was also carried westward: the qanat or kariz, an under
ground canal which brought water, often over long distances, from aquifers at
the base of mountains to fields, villages and towns. At the same time, two
water lifting devices, which had been known to the Romans but were little
used until the labour shortages of the fifth and sixth centuries, were widely
diffused through the early Islamic world. These were the noria or water
wheel, which was driven by the flow of streams and rivers, and the saqiya or
chain of pots, powered by animals.

Thus similarities in physical environment, commonalities in agricultural
heritage, the imprint of the Arab conquerors and of Islam and, finally, a
massive diffusion of agricultural technologies from east to west: these seem
to account for the limited variety of agricultural forms found throughout the
early Islamic world.

Only later, when Islam moved outwards into new areas, or when new
forms were introduced by invaders or migrants coming from outside, or when
new modes of production slowly evolved within the Islamic world in response

to new conditions, did greater variation appear. Just three examples out of

many will be given here to illustrate the growing complexity of agriculture in

later times; several other cases will be treated later in this chapter. As Islam

spread into sub Saharan Africa, it came to embrace quasi sedentary commun

ities whose members burned stretches of the savannah for shifting cultivation.

In some of the lands of the Balkans conquered by the Ottomans, for instance

on the plains of Wallachia, another mode of exploitation appeared: this closely

resembled the medieval European manor, which may well be its origin, with

share cropping tenants who cultivated their own holdings, performed labour

services on the owner's demesne and grazed animals on common pasture

lands. Finally, in parts of Central Asia there is evidence in the fifteenth and

sixteenth centuries of what Jiirgen Paul has called a communite villageoise, a

seemingly more ancient type of settlement in which villagers collectively

controlled the construction and maintenance of irrigation works, the distribu

tion of water and, apparently, the allocation and reallocation of farmlands

which individual cultivators were not allowed to alienate. Whether such communities were introduced by conquerors or migrants coming from out

side or evolved within the Islamic world is not clear, but the principle of collective management suggests a nomadic origin. 2

Jiirgen Paul, 'Le village en Asie centrale aux XVe et XVIe siecles', CaMers du Monde Russe
et Sovietique, 32 (1991).

2.94

Rural life and economy until 1800

Interfaces: cities and nomads

Rural people in the Islamic world had crucial relations with two non
agricultural elements of society: city dwellers and nomadic pastoralists.
Together, these involvements were in large measure though certainly not
entirely responsible for the rhythm of growth and decay that periodised
the
region's agricultural history.

Between the cities and the countryside there was a flow, in both
directions,
of money, services and goods. Funds moved from agriculturists to cities
in the
form of taxes, rents and other dues, which were the main support for the
bureaucracy, the military and a land owning rentier class. There was a
return
flow of money to the countryside, as landowners and urban moneylenders
provided loans to allow farmers to buy inputs, to tide them over till
harvest
time and to get them through years of bad harvests; the frequent inability
of
borrowers to repay on time was one factor leading to the build up of
great
estates. Funds might also flow from the cities as governments took an
interest
in the construction and repair of large irrigation works, though often the
labour needed for such work was provided by corvees. The city more
precisely the government was also the main source of whatever
protection
could be given to rural dwellers against invaders, marauders and
Bedouin. In
the other direction, the countryside sent to the city some of its excess of
labour
to seek seasonal or long term employment in households, services and
indus
try. Trade saw the cities exporting some industrial goods to the
countryside,
most notably textiles and tools, while the agricultural surplus of crops
and
animals was, in large measure, sold to the cities. Indeed, the cities
depended
almost entirely upon the countryside for their food supplies and for many
of
their industrial raw materials; and as cities grew they drew into their
orbits

ever larger hinterlands where agriculture became increasingly specialised and
intensive. When hinterlands could not increase their surpluses at prices that
were economic, the growth of cities was blocked unless long distance trade
could offer alternative sources of supply. Thus although city dwellers and
agriculturists are often seen as opposing worlds in Islamic belief, the former
favoured over the latter by the Prophet and his religion, in fact they lived in a
close symbiotic relationship. The spectacular rise of cities in the early centu
ries of Islam was possible only because of a corresponding development of
agriculture.

Contacts between sedentary rural people and nomadic pastoralists often
referred to as Bedouin were perhaps more limited. Indeed, to some extent
the worlds of these two peoples who shared the countryside seem

295

diametrically opposed. They had different modes of production, different
cultures, different values, different dress and different diets. At the margins
they competed for land. Yet for this very reason there were periodic shiftings
of people and land between these two ways of life. As Bedouin populations
rose or the yield of their pastures fell, or as the protection of sedentary
agriculture became lax, they might extend their pastures onto cultivated
lands. When sedentary agriculture was contracting, for whatever reason,
farmers might become nomads. Those who could most easily make the switch
were those already engaged in animal production; they had the necessary
skills and they often lived in regions where farming was most at risk.

Conversely, there were periods when settled communities, usually with government support, might take over fertile pasture lands or Bedouin might
be settled on these lands; typically, Bedouin settlements would be of the majshar type, producing mainly animals which grazed on common pastures,
or else they would consist of small villages where crops were grown and animals entrusted to herders for transhumant grazing.

Even when the balance between sedentarism and nomadism was stable the frontiers between these two opposing worlds were porous, allowing for
a peaceful flow of goods in both directions. Bedouin typically sold a part of
their surplus production of animals, milk products, hides and wool to settled
rural communities, most particularly to those that did not produce large animals, and especially at the times of the great annual feasts when large numbers of sheep would be slaughtered. And Bedouin obtained a good part of their grain supplies from sedentary farmers. In many parts of the Islamic world these exchanges were effected in rural markets, which as yet
have been little studied. These gathered weekly or monthly on sites lying at
convenient distances from a number of villages and near to the nomads' pasturelands. Through the week the markets in a region might rotate from
one site to another, so that on most or all days of the week there was an operating market.

Vulnerabilities

Partly because of the dependency of farmers on city dwellers and Bedouin,
and partly for very different reasons, farming was an uncertain, risky under
taking, and in many regions agriculture itself was fragile. Rural prosperity
depended on the behaviour of various elements in the cities: on the ability and
willingness of rulers to tax fairly, to maintain the larger irrigation works and to
provide protection to settled communities, their lands and their trade; on the

296

Rural life and economy until 1800

interest in their estates or the neglect of these on the part of landowners
living in the cities; on the size of markets, near and distant, which varied
as
urban populations waxed or waned and as trade routes opened or closed.
Rural producers were also at the mercy of urban rulers, bureaucrats and
merchants who might unscrupulously manipulate grain supplies and
prices.
On the interface with the Bedouin other vulnerabilities appeared. In fact,
the
Bedouin were an ever present threat in most regions, particularly in the
many
places where settlement was discontinuous or bordered on nomadic
grazing
lands. Even in the best of times such communities could not easily be
protected against Bedouin razzias, transhumance or longer term
incursions.
The trade routes on which agriculturists depended might be even more
difficult to defend.

To complete the list of rural vulnerabilities, it is important to note that
farmers were also subject to the vagaries of nature and they were,
moreover,
in many times and places, the victims of their own excesses. Nature
might
strike in many ways. There were great year to year fluctuations in
rainfall,
river flows and temperatures; and there could be harsh winds,
hailstorms,
infestations of rodents and insects and attacks of plant and animal
diseases.
Perhaps for these reasons the Qur'an views good harvests as a gift of God
rather than the fruit of human labour endowed with agricultural skills
devel
oped over eight or more millennia. And certainly there were many years
when harvests failed over smaller or larger areas. Michael Dols has
stated that
between 661 and 1500 there are records of 186 major famines in the
Islamic
world, a figure he thinks is 'far too low' owing to the incompleteness of
the

sources. Famines could cause high death rates in the cities, and also in the
countryside where, even in good times, peasants often lived barely above
the subsistence level. When starvation was followed by disease, as often
happened, mortality rose still further. [3]

Finally, the activities of agriculturists themselves might in the long term
damage agriculture. Over cultivation could deplete soils of their fertility;
over irrigation could lower water tables or lead to salinisation of soil, espe
dally in Iraq; and over grazing degraded the vegetation of pasture lands, often
leaving little that animals would eat. Furthermore, over cultivation, over
grazing and deforestation left land more vulnerable to erosion by rainfall,
winds and floods, and in not a few places the soil cover on which agriculture
depended was lost. Whether these human activities also caused climate

3 Michael Dols, 'Famine in the Islamic world', in Joseph Strayer (ed.), Dictionary of the
Middle Ages, 13 vols. (New York, 1982 9), vol. V, pp. 1 3.

297

changes affecting agriculture, or whether there was any change in climate for
other reasons, are questions that cannot yet be answered.

In any case, these dependencies of agriculture on urban dwellers, Bedouin,
natural phenomena and the practices of farmers themselves are responsible for
short term fluctuations in rural prosperity. And they are also in large measure
responsible for the longer term cycles of agricultural progress and decline.

Periodisation: ups and downs

In this necessarily very brief treatment of agricultural history over a vast
expanse of the earth's surface and over a very long stretch of time it will
not be possible to describe in detail, let alone attempt to explain, the long term
fluctuations in rural fortunes. Only the most cursory overview can be offered.
Once the disruptions caused by the Arab conquests were over, the early
centuries of Islam were nearly everywhere a time of sustained agricultural
progress, in which the area of sedentary agriculture expanded and the pro
ductivity of most categories of agricultural land and labour rose. Backed by
policies of the Umayyad and 'Abbasid caliphates, local pastoralists and con
quering Arabs in many regions were persuaded to become sedentary farmers.
Thus, for instance, in several parts of Ifriqiya and the Maghrib nomadic
Berbers and other transhumant tribes began constructing huts to replace
tents and cultivating fields at the expense of grazing. According to recently
published archaeological evidence a large region in the central Euphrates
Valley, which on the eve of Islam was virtually uninhabited, had 103 villages
by the early ninth century. 4 In this process of sedentarisation the widespread
construction of irrigation works canals, embankments, weirs, dams, dykes,
reservoirs, terraces and water lifting machines was often critical. These
brought more water to more land over more months of the year, and quite
often perennial irrigation was achieved. One outstanding example of many is
the large scale water engineering projects undertaken by the governor of Iraq,
al Hajjaj ibn Yusuf (d. 714) in the region of Wasit, which he founded. Similarly,
Ziyad ibn Abihi (d. 680), the governor of two other new cities, Basra and Kufa,
each surrounded by newly irrigated hinterlands, ordered the construction of
two large canals connecting Basra with the Shatt al Arab. Still other important
irrigation and land reclamation works in the Sawad were undertaken by

private developers.

4 Sophie Berthier et al., Peuplement rural et amenagements hydroagricoles dans la moyenne vallee
de I'Euphrate, fin Vile XIXe siecle (Damascus, 2001), passim.

Rural life and economy until 1800

The new crops also played an important role. Some, such as sorghum and watermelons, were relatively drought tolerant and thus encouraged the advance of agriculture into drier areas. Many other new crops were either
permanent crops such as citrus and banana trees or were summer crops; both required heavy irrigation during the summer months and thus went hand in hand with progress in irrigation. Together, the traditional and new crops permitted new rotations in which land could be cropped two or more times a year without fallowing; the greater flexibility of rotations allowed farmers to take special advantage of micro climates and
local soils.

The gains in productivity achieved in these ways are bound up with general
economic development, demographic growth and the spread of the money
economy into the countryside. More particularly, they are linked, as both cause and effect, to the impressive rise of cities.

But in many places growth was not to last. As early as the ninth century, when agriculture was still prospering in most of the Islamic world, settlement
retreated from the western fringes of the desert in the Hijaz, in Transjordania
and in much of Syria. In the eastern part of this desert, along the middle Euphrates, there was a dramatic decline of settlement as many communities
were abandoned. The causes of this early decline are obscure: possibly it is due
to climate change, or perhaps settlement had pushed into regions where

rainfall and river flows were too low and too variable for viable agriculture,
or perhaps the slow decentralisation and decline of the powers of the caliphate
left the government unable to protect sedentary agriculture in these regions.
Whatever the explanation, the eleventh century saw new threats to agricul
ture, as nomadic invaders overran large areas in the eastern and western parts
of the Islamic world. In the west, the Banu Hilal, a nomadic people from
northern Arabia, devastated agriculture in Cyrenaica and Tripolitania, and
then, in 1052, moved on to Ifriqiya and the western Maghrib, where they
destroyed most inland settlements and forced a retreat of sedentary agricul
ture back to coastal regions; the littoral towns were obliged to turn to Sicily for
a large part of their grain supplies. In the eastern part of the caliphate the
Saljuq Turks, another nomadic people, established an empire based in Persia
in 1040; after raiding Anatolia repeatedly in the early part of the century they
fought the Byzantines, and won a decisive victory in 1071. This was followed
by a massive movement into Anatolia of nomadic Turcomans, who were largely unsympathetic to sedentary agriculture. In the century that followed
the frequent battles with Byzantines and Crusaders prevented agricultural
recovery in most of Anatolia.

299

The New Cambridge History of Islam

The subsequent history of the rural economy in the Islamic world is the tale
of periods of recovery, and even advance, followed by further decay, in which

regional variation became more evident. In general, agriculture continued to
suffer from the successive waves of invaders who, with almost monotonous
regularity, overran different parts of the Islamic world: the Crusaders,
Ayyubids, Mongols, Timurids and Ottomans in the east, and the
Almoravids and Almohads in the west. Like the Banu Hilal and the Saljuqs,
these later conquerors were mostly nomadic or semi nomadic peoples, more
familiar with grazing and extensive grain cultivation than with the intensive,
irrigated agriculture that had developed so brilliantly in the early Islamic
world. In the course of their conquests they often destroyed settlements and
irrigation works, and their victories were usually followed by large scale
immigration of nomads into the conquered areas. The usually short lived
regimes they established often showed little interest in promoting agriculture.
Particularly devastating were the conquests of the Mongols in thirteenth
century West Asia: these were followed by massive slaughters of city dwellers
and rural folk alike, neglect or destruction of irrigation works and widespread
abandonment of cultivated land, triggering what I. P. Petrushevsky has called
a 'colossal economic decline'. 5 Recovery was thwarted by the Black Death,
which, through the second half of the fourteenth century, reduced population
by perhaps one third in territories formerly ruled by the Mongols (and indeed
all over West Asia, North Africa and al Andalus), making intensive agricul
ture, in most places, unnecessary and uneconomic.

To be sure, after the initial damage of the conquests some of the conquerors
were able to create governments that were sufficiently strong and stable to
support agriculture; and in fact the strength and stability of their governments
depended in considerable measure on prosperity in the countryside. One such
example is Spain under its Berber conquerors, the Almoravids and the
Almohads, where not only did intensive agriculture flourish in many places
but agricultural science was advanced on botanical gardens and experimental

farms, and scholars wrote extensively on the emerging science of
agriculture.
Other examples are Egypt under the Bahri Mamluks (1240 1382), Iran
during
the rule of Ghazan Khan (1295 1304), Yemen in the time of the Rasulid
kings
(early thirteenth century 1428), the Ottoman empire from 1470 until the
end
of the rule of Siileyman the Magnificent in 1566, and Iran during the
reign of

5 I. P. Petrushevsky, 'The socio economic condition of Iran under the II
Khans', in The
Cambridge history of Iran, 7 vols, in 8 (London and New York, 1968 91),
vol. V; J. A. Boyle
(ed.), The Saljuq and Mongol periods, p. 483.

300

Rural life and economy until 1800

Shah c Abbas I (1571 1629). In general, these were periods when
governments
were sufficiently strong to provide the support needed by agriculture and
sedentarisation of nomads was encouraged; they were also usually times
when trade flourished and money supplies were relatively abundant,
factors
which may have contributed to the strength of governments. Agricultural
revival in the early modern era may also have been fed by new crops
arriving
in the Islamic world following the voyages of discovery: from China came
sweet oranges and from the New World were brought maize, potatoes,
sweet
potatoes, capsicum peppers, tomatoes, tobacco, New World cotton and
haricot, runner and lima beans. Although maize (fed at first to animals
and
later to human beings) spread quickly through the early modern Islamic
world, the other crops seem to have been diffused more slowly; they may

nevertheless have given some new strength to agriculture, even in its periods
of decay.

Recovery from invasions, regressive policies and epidemics grew increas
ingly difficult as new landholding and taxation arrangements became more
widespread and more pernicious. The earliest of these was tax farming.
Adopted in the 'Abbasid caliphate in the ninth century, the delegation of tax
collection to provincial governors allowed them to collect, and largely keep,
the taxes from their jurisdictions. Collection in some regions was soon
decentralised further as individuals were allowed to buy the taxation rights
over smaller or larger areas of the provinces; rates of taxation tended to rise
and become more arbitrary in such areas, and peasants had little recourse. The
second of these harmful institutions was the iqtd\ introduced by the Buyids
and the Saljuqs in the eleventh century and widely adopted in later centuries.
This was a benefice granted to high ranking officers; in return for military
service, the holder obtained the right to collect and retain taxes over consid
erable areas of agricultural land. Originally granted for a period of years or for
a lifetime, the iqta' thus encouraged short term maximisation of revenue with
little reinvestment in land or irrigation works. In some regions it became
hereditary and the holder began to assume 'feudal' rights over lands and
people in his benefice, thus obscuring the locus of land ownership and some
times extinguishing individual property rights. Finally, the institution of the
waqf had further damaging effects on agricultural production. By the tenth
century this had become a means of granting lands in perpetuity to charitable
institutions, such as mosques, schools and caravanserais. Typically, the recip
ient had little agricultural knowledge and little interest in managing the lands
received; and as an institution's endowments grew in size its holdings became
increasingly scattered and difficult to supervise. Many wacjflands also escaped

The New Cambridge History of Islam

taxation. Because they were in principle inalienable, the progressive accumu
lation of such endowments was difficult to stop: by later Ottoman times it has
been estimated that the dead hand of the waqf had touched three quarters of
the empire's agricultural land. Thus all three arrangements tended to under
mine enlightened management of lands by peasants or owners; by eroding
state revenues they also weakened the ability of the state to govern and hence
to promote agriculture. As these institutions spread, further decline seemed
inevitable. Recovery, when it occurred, was usually incomplete and often
short lived.

Indeed, from the early or mid seventeenth century onwards the general
trend was downwards: rural areas were slowly depopulated, trade faltered,
and agricultural output and productivity fell. Only with the arrival of the
colonial powers did matters change, but then the change did not always
benefit peasants or landowners.

Trade

Probably the most powerful engine of agricultural progress was trade. It led to
the specialisation of land use in those activities for which land was better
suited. It also encouraged specialisation of the labour force, which thereby
improved its skills. The pressure to increase productivity occurred not only on
the lands shifted to commercial production but also on the reduced areas
available for subsistence agriculture. Where these latter became insufficient

for a community's needs, it would start buying part of its sustenance from
other villages; these would then try to increase their productivity. If land or
labour was scarce, the ripples could travel far.

It is probable that in the Islamic world, at all times and in all places, there
were few rural communities that did not trade. In the panoply of types of
agricultural undertakings described by Vincent Lagardere and outlined above,
probably none was near to self sufficiency. They all traded, most on a consid
erable scale; indeed, without trade they could not have survived, and the
modes of agricultural production would have been very different and less
productive. The munya and janna were clearly involved in production of fruits
and vegetables for sale in urban markets, and their inhabitants must have
bought meat, and probably grains, from elsewhere. The rahal appears to have
produced few or no large animals, and its inhabitants must have procured
small amounts of meat and perhaps wool, skins and milk products from
other estates. The majshar and other communities raising animals seem to
have produced no crops at all, and must have obtained these from others.

302

Rural life and economy until 1800

Although the inhabitants of the day'a and the qarya may have been more self
sufficient than those on other types of undertakings, almost certainly they too
depended, to varying degrees, on markets. Trade occurred not only at the
rural markets described above, where settled communities could trade with

one another and with Bedouin, but also at markets on the outskirts of towns,
where agriculturists, Bedouin and city dwellers could all exchange their products.

Specialisation of the rural labour force seems to have been carried further
by the fact that household industries in the countryside both usufacture and
market oriented industries appear to have been negligible. While rural areas
did have some non household industries, such as mining, and considerable
amounts of raw and spun silk were indeed produced in rural households, the
overwhelming part of industrial production seems to have occurred in cities.
As far as one can tell from the sources, even the production of textiles, pottery
and baskets, as well as much of the processing of foods, was carried out mainly
in urban workshops. Rural dwellers, therefore, seem to have depended on the
cities for most of their tools, cloth, pots and much else. This division of
industrial labour in turn put pressure on rural dwellers to produce still greater
agricultural surpluses: in order to buy industrial products, in addition to a part
of their food supplies, they had to sell more.

As cities grew in the period from 700 to 1100, sometimes reaching unpre
cedented sizes for their regions, rural specialisation increased. Thus in Ifriqiya
in the early eleventh century, the expanding hinterland of the capital,
Qayrawan, encompassed what Claudette Vanacker has called a juxtaposition
of specialised zones'. The region of Fahs al Darrara sent grains and fruits to the
capital; the lands between Qayrawan and Sfax produced olives; the area north
of Gafsa specialised in animal production; the oasis of Tozeur exported
northwards (according to al Bakri) a thousand camel loads of dates almost
every day; a number of areas sent saffron for the city's textile industry; and
other localities provided pistachios, figs, silk cocoons and flowers. These and
other specialisations were held in place by the ability of the zones to trade with

one another and with the capital.

Some regions of agricultural specialisation traded not only with nearby cities but with more distant markets. Where conditions permitted, such longer distance trade could lead to much larger areas of agricultural land

6 Claudette Vanacker, 'Geographie economique de l'Afrique du Nord selon les auteurs
arabes, du Xle siecle au milieu du Xlle siecle', Annates: Economies, Societes, Civilisations,
28 (1973).

being given over to near monoculture. Thus, for instance, although cotton
was grown widely over almost all the Islamic world from 800 onwards, certain
zones of intense specialisation appeared: a wide stretch of land in the highlands
of Syria reaching from Aleppo south to Harm; a southern extension of this
zone around the lake of al Hula, where 200 villages were said to be given over
to cotton production; the lower Tigris and its dependent canals around Basra;
and the area in the upper Euphrates Valley around Nahr Habur. Equally
concentrated production of sugar cane could be found from the tenth century
onwards in the Sind, in Khuzistan, on much of the Levantine coastal plain,
in the Jordan Valley, along the Nile and in its Delta, and in the Sus in southern
Morocco. The cotton and sugar produced in these regions were exported in
many directions, sometimes to very distant markets. As trans Mediterranean

trade opened up from 1100 onwards, cotton bought by European merchants
in the eastern Mediterranean supplied a growing textile industry in northern
Italy and later in Germany; and sugar of various types began appearing in
Barcelona, Marseilles and the northern Italian cities, whence some of it made
its way to markets in north western Europe.

Whether the specialisation in land use induced by such extensive trade led
to changes in the mode of production is not clear from the sources, which
have little to say on the subject. It seems, however, that large and small units,
using family, tenant and wage labour, could all successfully compete in the
production of speciality crops for sale. Quite possibly, in the absence of
agricultural slaves and colonial overlords, there were no economies of scale
to be derived from large scale production of the plantation type. We do learn,
however, that in fourteenth century Egypt the Banu Fudayl family planted
2500 feddans of sugar cane every year. In both Egypt and Syria Mamluk amirs,
viziers, princes and even sultans were deeply involved in the production of
sugar cane on their estates. As they paid little or nothing in taxes they had an
advantage over other producers, whom they partially displaced; and on the
sultan's estates this advantage was increased as tenants became liable to
corvee on lands he exploited directly. Mamluk producers came to exercise
greater control over the industry through vertical integration: many acquired
their own sugar presses and refineries. Carrying this process one stage further,
the Sultan Barsbay (1422 38) attempted to establish a state monopoly over
both the production of cane and the manufacture of sugar. Perhaps indeed we
can see here the beginnings of a plantation mode of production.

While incorporation into the emerging world economy undoubtedly
increased incomes from agricultural activities, these gains came at a price.

Not only were the rewards unevenly distributed, so that the returns to labour

304

Rural life and economy until 1800

in some cases hardly changed, or even fell, but dependence on overseas markets also created new vulnerabilities for peasants, landowners and mer
chants. All found themselves at the mercy of events in distant places over which they and their rulers had no control: trade cycles, wars, changes in taste
and competition from other sources of supply could all adversely affect markets and prices, and sometimes markets simply dried up. In the fifteenth
century the Spanish and Portuguese introduced sugar cane into the islands of
Madeira, the Canaries, Santiago and Sao Tome; and by the sixteenth sugar
from these islands was flooding onto European and Arab markets. By then,
too, the voyages of discovery had opened sea routes to continents with vast
tropical and semi tropical regions, where sugar cane, rice, cotton, bananas and
other crops of tropical origin could be grown more cheaply. By the end of the seventeenth century these crops had largely disappeared from the Mediterranean basin, where they had once been so important, as well as from some parts of West Asia. In the eighteenth century the British shifted
their source of raw silk from Iran to India. By the end of that century coffee
production long the exclusive domain of Yemen had spread to India, South East Asia, the Indonesian archipelago and Central and South America.

Where European trading companies still sought agricultural products from
Islamic regions, as they did from Islamic parts of West Africa, India, South

East Asia and the Indonesian archipelago, there was every danger that they
would try to maximise profits by monopolising first the export and then the
production of the goods: they could then buy more cheaply and sell at higher
prices, thus capturing monopoly profits from both production and trade. To
establish and enforce their monopolies they usually found that political con
trol was needed, and regions exporting key agricultural products to Europe
became prime targets for colonial rule.

Thus, in the early modern period, as the world economy tightened, agriculturists in many parts of the Islamic world had a foretaste of new vulnerabilities. In the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries there was worse to come.

305

10

Demography and migration

SURAIYA N. FAROQHI

Estimating medieval population figures

A number of suggestions have been made for estimating urban populations
for periods from which no direct data are extant, some being more convincing
than others. Thus it is problematic to assume that the floor space of a given
city's principal mosque indicates the size of the relevant settlement, or at least
of its adult male population, unless a written source tells us that such a

relationship did in fact exist. Patrons may well have financed a huge building
due to considerations of 'magnificence' or political rivalry, or else they may
have wished to provide for villagers who came to the city on market days and
attended communal prayers on this occasion. None of these considerations
was connected to the actual number of inhabitants. Another measure of pre
modern urban populations, namely the quantities of grain needed to feed a
given city, can only convey a very rough notion: rich people may have fed
grain to their animals, thus augmenting the demand, or else others may have
had supplementary sources of food in their gardens and thus needed less than
the statistical minimum of grain required to keep body and soul together. But
even so, where information on grain consumption is available it does provide
an idea of urban population size.

As to the number of public baths (hammams) in a good sized city, which has
also been suggested as a measure of population, it is probably a better
criterion; for baths were supposed to make money, and thus probably were
built only if the owners anticipated an appreciable number of customers. But
the construction of such facilities indicates merely the geographical expansion
of the city; certainly this latter feature will often, but by no means always, be
consonant with population growth. Something similar can be said about the
progressive removal of tanneries away from the city centre, also cited as a sign
of urban growth: due to the smells the latter tended to give off, it is indeed
probable that they were moved as soon as houses appeared in the vicinity. But

Demography and migration

once again we do not know for sure whether the expansion of the built up
area involved an increase of the urban population, or whether it was only a
concomitant of lower habitation densities.

A similar argument can be made in the case of new pious foundations such
as mosques and dervish lodges, whose dissemination has been observed
and analysed, among other places, in Ottoman Arab cities such as Aleppo,
Damascus and Cairo. 1 After all, new mosques and other buildings may have
been constructed on the urban perimeter because land was cheaper there than
in the centre of the city, while the connection to population increase could
once again have been quite tenuous. Or else the city centre already contained
numerous pious foundations, so that additional land was simply not available
at any cost. We can also assume that sometimes new immigrants arriving, for
instance, after a major epidemic wanted or were obliged to live apart from the
established population: in this case they might sponsor new pious foundations
even though the total number of urbanites did not substantially increase.

But on the other hand, there is not much sense in quibbling and hyper
criticism: especially if several phenomena of the kind described here coincided,
there is a strong case for assuming that urban population really did increase.
Admittedly all these methods of estimation only apply to towns, while rural
populations of the pre Ottoman period remain almost completely unknown.

Attempts to trace the broad outlines of population growth in the pre
Ottoman centuries of Middle Eastern history can therefore only involve the
direction of change. We can discern losses due to the Black Death and other

pandemics, or else gains in a given town or region due to substantial immi
gration. By contrast, any attempt to establish absolute numbers, incidentally
one of the major aims of historical demography, has led to estimates so
divergent that at least in the eyes of the present author they are best
ignored. 2 Even more problematic, or so it seems to me, are estimations of
trends based not on conclusions derived from primary written sources or
archaeological observations but rather from assumptions connected with the
world view of a particular historian. One of the best known cases of this type
is the belief that the population of Egypt and Syria, at one time prosperous
core provinces of the Roman empire, declined constantly until about the
thirteenth/nineteenth century. 3 Judgements based on overall considerations
of this kind may at first glance seem to a have a higher scientific status due to

i Andre Raymond, GranA.es villes arabes a Vepoque ottomane (Paris, 1985), pp. 206 14.

2 Bassim Musallam, Sex and society in Islam (Cambridge, 1983), pp. in 12.

3 Ibid., p. no.

307

The New Cambridge History of Islam

the generality inherent in them; yet such reasoning can also lower the status of
countervailing empirical evidence, and thus lead us badly astray.

There is no doubt that population plummeted during certain periods

throughout the entire Mediterranean world; this applied particularly to the
later 700s/ 1300s and the entire ninth /fifteenth century, when the plague was at
its most virulent. But that the same trend continued unabated in the tenth/
sixteenth century and beyond should, at the very least, be considered not
proven'. Even the claims of contemporaries that the 'decline of the times'
involved among other matters a decreasing population are not always to
be taken at face value: even in early modern Europe it was often and quite
mistakenly claimed that the population of the period was smaller than that of
Roman times. By contrast, some indirect evidence has been unearthed indicat
ing that in Egypt during the later tenth/ sixteenth century population may in
fact have picked up again. Thus sugar cultivation, which had been given up in
the ninth/ fifteenth century, probably because the labour force had become
too small, revived somewhat during the late 900s /1500s and early 1000s/
1600s. 4

Whether the interventions of men and women had an impact upon popula
tion size is also difficult to ascertain. Many Muslim jurists were willing to
tolerate birth control, albeit in certain cases with reluctance, provided that the
family lived in straitened circumstances and the man first gained the consent of
his wife. Moreover, fairly accurate information on the relevant techniques was
available not only in specialised treatises, accessible only to a limited number of
specialist scholars, but also in legal texts studied by a much larger number of
readers. We may assume that during times of crisis birth control was practised
by a certain number of couples at least in the towns of Syria and Egypt, from
where most of the literature on contraception apparently originated. But once
again we have no numeric data at our disposal; and a great deal of caution is
required when drawing inferences from purely qualitative information.

Migrations: Arabs in the Mashriq and in Spain,

Berbers in al-Andalus 5

While our sources contain plenty of evidence concerning migrations that
occurred throughout the first/seventh to ninth/fifteenth centuries, this
infor
mation is almost never quantitative; moreover, the few figures recorded
in

4 Nelly Hanna, Making big money in 1600: The life and times ofhma'il
Abu Taqiyya, Egyptian
merchant (Syracuse, 1998), pp. 90 1.

5 The term Mashriq stands for Syria, Egypt and Iraq, and Maghrib for
North Africa to the west
of Egypt. The Muslim regions of Spain and Portugal are described by the
term al Andalus.

308

Demography and migration

chronicles should be regarded with extreme caution. The Arab conquests
immediately following the acceptance of Islam, by both sedentary people
and
nomads originally inhabiting the Hijaz, resulted in far flung migrations.
However, the conquests themselves were made by more or less
professional
armies, and not by entire tribes on the march; immigration by the
nomads'
families normally took place after military action had been completed.
While
on campaign fighters from the same tribe were typically grouped
together.
Yet the leaders from this milieu commanding their fellow tribesmen
occupied
rather lowly places in the military hierarchy, higher echelon commanders
typically being chosen from among the urban population. As a result it
was
difficult for tribal leaders to break away from the Muslim army on the
occasion of some dispute or other, and the early Islamic conquests should
not be viewed as tribal actions.

On the contrary, the early caliphs evidently regarded settlement and the abandonment of a nomadic lifestyle as a guarantee of loyalty to the cause of
Islam, and established the Bedouin who had immigrated into Iraq after the
Muslim conquest in army camps that soon mutated into cities. While the same
policy was also applied in Syria it was of less importance there because many
tribesmen preferred to settle in the numerous towns and cities that had flourished in this area since Antiquity and through early Byzantine times. A
major aim of founding new camp towns such Kufa, Basra or Ramla must have
been the control of the former Byzantine and Sasanid subjects living in these
areas. But in addition, the settling of many former nomads in urban settings
was probably intended as a means of controlling those tribes that as desert
dwellers were considered especially prone to rebellion. 7

Other groups of Arabs settled along the Mediterranean coasts of North Africa and passed on into Spain, Arab troops entering the Visigoth kingdom in
92/711. In the following two years the country was rapidly conquered as far as
Saragossa and Toledo. Barcelona and Narbonne in today's Mediterranean
France soon followed suit, and in 114/732 an Arab expedition was defeated
on the banks of the Loire, near Tours and Poitiers, by Charles Martel, the grandfather of Charlemagne. By 185/801, when the latter's son Louis con quered Catalonia, the Umayyad caliphate of the west (138 422/756 1031) controlled virtually the entire Peninsula.

6 Fred McGraw Donner, The early Islamic conquests (Princeton, 1981), pp. 221 2.

7 Ibid., pp. 262 7.

8 E. Levi Provencal, 'al Andalus', Eh, vol. I; Charles Julian Bishko, 'The Spanish and
Portuguese reconquest', in Kenneth Setton (gen. ed.), A history of the Crusades

(Madison, 1969 89), vol. Ill: Harry Hazard (ed.), The fourteenth and fifteenth centuries.

The New Cambridge History of Islam

The Islamic conquest led to the immigration into what is today Spain and
Portugal of both Berbers from western North Africa (Maghrib) and of
Arabs
who themselves had arrived in the Maghrib only a few generations
earlier.
However the bulk of Spanish Muslims probably were descended from
converts,
although throughout the Islamic period it was a source of pride if a
family could
point to Arab ancestry. Bilingualism in Arabic and the locally spoken
Romance
languages was common. However, the Berbers, once established in al
Andalus,
soon were Arabised linguistically. Berber immigration occurred not only
during
the original conquest but also as a result of successive takeovers on the
part
of Berber dynasties during the fifth /eleventh and sixth/twelfth centuries;
for
the Almoravids and Almohads, as they are known in Western
historiography,
brought along their own mercenaries. In addition, slave traders supplied
wealthy
households with black people from Africa, and also the so called
Saqaliba, who
were of Slavic or Germanic background. By 390/1000 these different
ethnic
groups had organised themselves politically; and when the Umayyad
caliphate
entered a period of crisis during that very period, the ethno political
factions of
Andalusians, Berbers and Saqaliba set up a multitude of small states that
lasted
until the Almoravid takeover of the late fifth/ eleventh century.

In the Middle Ages, when the Peninsula was also home to a substantial Jewish population, it was generally assumed that Catholic rulers might have Muslim and Jewish subjects. However, in 897/1492, with the fall of Nasrid Granada to Isabella and Ferdinand, the rulers of Castile and Aragon, this policy changed radically. Jews and Muslims were now required to accept baptism if they wished to remain. Moreover, the activities of the Inquisition, which, through an elaborate apparatus of spies, attempted to find out whether the recently baptised secretly adhered to their former religions, made life extremely difficult and dangerous for ex Muslims and former Jews. As a result Jewish refugees, either directly or by detours, made their way to the Ottoman empire, where the sultans settled them in the capital and particularly in Salonika. Muslim communities with a Christian veneer (Moriscos) continued to exist in Spain throughout the tenth/ sixteenth century, although there was much piecemeal emigration to North Africa, particularly after a failed uprising in the region of Granada (976 7/1568 70). Moreover, probably around 300,000 people became refugees when all Moriscos were driven out of Spain between 1018/1609 and 1023/1614. 9

9 Antonio Dominguez Ortiz and Bernard Vincent, Historia de los Moriscos: Vida y tragedia de una minoria (Madrid, 1978), pp. 17 35; Mercedes Garcia Arenal, La diaspora des Andalousiens (Paris, 2003).

310

Demography and migration

In North Africa: the mass migrations
of the Banu Hilal

Throughout the history of al Andalus, nomads were never of any significance.
But they did migrate into North Africa on a large enough scale that regions
in which Berber languages had previously been spoken were largely Arabised.
At the same time nomadism was diffused, especially in Ifriqiya. This process
has been described by the historian Ibn Khaldun (732 808/1332 1406), who had
been born in Tunis and educated there; he thus knew the affected areas
at first hand. According to Ibn Khaldun, in the mid fifth /eleventh century
the c Abbasid caliph in Baghdad had been recognised by a ruler governing the
central part of North Africa, and this move resulted in an act of revenge by the
Abbasid's major rival, the Fatimid caliph of Egypt al Mustansir. The latter sent
the tribesmen known as the Banu Hilal, who up to this time had been
nomadising in Upper Egypt and causing trouble to his own government, to
the territories west of the Nile, where the immigrants appropriated resources
for themselves and their half starved families by pillaging the countryside and
finally also the towns. The major city of Qayrawan was taken and plundered
(449/1057). The Banu Hilal retained a dominant position for about a century,
until the arrival of the Almohads in the mid 500S/1100S, when the tribesmen
were forced to pay allegiance to these sultans, who had their centre in
Morocco; the latter attempted to neutralise the nomads by incorporating
them into their own armies. Yet an attempt to transplant the Banu Hilal to
Spain, where they were to have fought the Christian princes, was thwarted by
the resistance of the tribesmen themselves. It has been assumed that the
Bedouin of the Maghrib are for the most part descendants of the Banu
Hilal. 10

Turkish migrants

Another major consequence of caliphal rule was the entry of Turks into the

Middle East, and also into India. Both nomads and sedentary people, Turkish

inhabitants of Central Asia first encountered Islam during the Arab conquest

of Transoxania, and especially following the battle of Talas (133/751); this spate

of warfare first brought Arab settlers into the region, and may have prevented

a rival Chinese takeover. But the massive entry of Turks into the Islamic world

was due to the recruitment of slave soldiers (manduks) and also of free

10 H. R. Idris, '[Banu] Hilal', Eh, vol. Ill, p. 385; Xavier de Planhol, Les fondements
geographiques de Vhistoire de VIslam (Paris, 1968), pp. 140 62.

mercenaries into the caliphs' armies during the third/ninth and fourth/tenth
centuries; some of these men came from the Khazar principality to the north
of the Caucasus, whose rulers had converted to Judaism. 11 Mercenaries were
paid by assigning them the right to collect taxes in a given place (iqta 1); for their
special benefit these grants, previously revocable at the ruler's will, became
hereditary concessions of the usufruct of important stretches of land.
Although even under the new dispensation the caliphs in principle retained
the right of confiscation and redistribution, exercising it in practice might
induce the mercenaries, now in a position of power, to rebel and even to
murder the ruler who had thus offended them.

Turkish mercenaries and slave guards became even more widespread as the
example of the 'Abbasid caliphs was followed by more localised dynasties such
as the Samanids, who ruled much of Iran in the fourth/ tenth century. Other
commanders of Turkish background who transformed military command
into political power included Ahmad ibn Tulun, who made himself ruler of
Egypt. Moreover, the Ghaznavid dynasty, which formed the most important
polity after the decline of 'Abbasid power, was inaugurated in the late 300s/
900s by a Turkish military slave named Sebiiktegin. While its centre was
located in what is today Afghanistan, the empire founded by Sebiiktegin and
expanded by his son Mahmud extended far into India, and thus Ghaznavid
rule first brought Turks into the subcontinent.

Moreover, once, in the fifth /eleventh century, Turkish military men were
established at the core of most Middle Eastern states, it became possible for
compact tribes to enter the region from Central Asia, without the previous
acculturation that most soldiers had gone through before they could obtain
positions of power. The resulting cultural conflict had political repercussions:
thus certain Turkish tribesmen considered that the succession to the sultanate
should go to the oldest living member of the dynasty (seniorate) and not to a
crown prince the previous ruler had designated during his lifetime, as inherent
in the Iranian tradition of absolute rule that, for instance, the Ghaznavids had
adopted. The immigration of such unassimilated tribes into an Islamic empire
could thus become a source of major instability.

Differences of opinion between the officials of setded government and
recently arrived tribesmen became politically relevant once the latter were
sufficiently numerous for a given ruler to try to use them as his power base.

11 C. E. Bosworth, 'Barbarian incursions: The coming of the Turks into the Islamic world',
in D. S. Richards (ed.), Islamic civilisation 950 lyo: A colloquium published under tfte auspices
of the Near Eastern History Group Oxford (Oxford, 1973).

312

Demography and migration

Moreover, new immigrants from Central Asia frequently replaced those ear
lier arrivals that had already adapted to the political structures of the Islamic
Middle East. Thus the Great Saljuq dynasty, which governed the central
Islamic lands in the fifth/ eleventh and sixth/ twelfth centuries, faced the
same problem as the Ghaznavids had done before them: the sultans had to
figure out a way of reconciling the political assumptions of their tribal backers
with Islamic and Iranian traditions of settled rule. In this case the challenge
was particularly urgent. Tribal protest on the part of the Ghuzz/Oguz, who
had migrated into Iran in large numbers, in 548/1153 6 led to the capture of
Sultan Sanjar, the last major representative of the Great Saljuq dynasty, and
also to the terrible sack of Nishapur and the demise of Sanjar's empire.

However, a secondary branch of the defunct dynasty continued to play an
important role. Because it was established in previously Byzantine Anatolia,
where it flourished during the sixth/twelfth and early seventh /thirteenth
centuries, its representatives were known as the Saljuq sultans of Rum.
After the emperor Romanos Diogenes had been defeated by the Great
Saljuq ruler Alp Arslan near the eastern Anatolian town of Malazgirt (463/
1071) state formation in Anatolia and concomitant Turkish settlement fol
lowed rapidly. While there had been substantial incursions into Byzantine
territory even before this event, Turkish immigration now became a mass

phenomenon, first in the aftermath of Malazgirt and a century later, following
the equally serious Byzantine defeat at Myriokephalon (572/1176). Raids and
counter raids were undertaken by both sides in large numbers. During the late
fifth/ eleventh and throughout the sixth/twelfth century, the Comnene
emperors built and repaired numerous Anatolian forts in order to consolidate
the territories they had more or less briefly regained. However, it is not
so clear how many of these fortified places were indeed inhabited over
lengthy periods of time. 12. Further Turkish settlement occurred after 659/
1261, when Constantinople had been regained from the occupying Crusaders
(600 59/1204 61) and Anatolia was no longer at the centre of Byzantine
preoccupations.

Most of the newly arriving Turks were probably Muslims by the time they
came to Anatolia, although remnants of nature cults lingered on for quite a
while. Fully trained religious scholars being rare among the nomads, the latter
relied on 'fathers' (babas) who from the viewpoint of formally schooled
Muslims might appear somewhat heterodox. But there were exceptions.

12 Clive Foss, 'The defenses of Asia Minor against the Turks', repr. in Clive Foss, Cities,
fortresses and villages of Asia Minor (Aldershot, 1996), V.

313

Thus apparently the Gagauz, Orthodox in religion and today a Turkish ethnic
minority in Romania and Ukraine, have taken their name from a Saljuq prince

named Kay Kavus, who went over to the Byzantines and was sent north with
his followers to the borderlands of what was, at the time, still imperial territory. 13

As so many immigrants into Anatolia were nomads the Saljuq administra
tion was concerned about the political threat that they might pose, and
therefore also dispatched them to distant places in other words, to the
Byzantine frontier. But an urban element was also present: Islamic scholars
from as far afield as today's Afghanistan felt the attraction of the Rum Saljuq
establishment in Konya, an important centre of courtly and religious culture.
Thus the famous mystical poet Mawlana Jalal al Din Rumi, who later was to
give his name to the Mawlawi order of dervishes, arrived from Balkh along
with his father, a well known scholar. A son in law of Ibn al c Arabi (560 638/
1165 1240), the famous mystic of Spanish origin, also resided in Konya and
gathered adherents for his master. Other Anatolian towns that Saljuq rulers
developed through sometimes spectacular pious foundations included Sivas
and Kayseri; communications and thus the arrival of foreign traders in the
sultan's domains were facilitated by the construction of numerous caravanser
ais. Nor did the closely connected processes of Turkish immigration and
Islamisation come to an end when the Saljuqs of Rum were defeated by the
Mongols in the mid seventh/thirteenth century. The Christian population of
Anatolia appears to have converted to Islam in fairly large numbers from the
sixth/ twelfth century onwards; this process was largely completed by the time
the first surviving Ottoman records were prepared in the middle of the ninth/
fifteenth century. 14

Mamluks in Egypt and Syria

As we have seen, Islamic rulers from Spain to northern India often used
military slaves in large numbers; this kind of recruitment always involved

immigration, usually over long distances, as the enslavement of subjects of a
Muslim ruler was forbidden by religious law. Wherever this system flourished
it was not rare for a successful freedman commander of soldiers to make
himself ruler. But what was remarkable about the regime of the Mamluks in

13 Speros Vryonis, The decline of medieval Hellenism in Asia Minor and the process of
Islamization from the eleventh through the fifteenth century (Berkeley, Los Angeles and
London, 1971), p. 192.

14 Ibid., pp. 383 91.

314

Demography and migration

Egypt and Syria (c. 648 922/1250 1517) was the fact that the typical succession
was not from father to son. Rather, the most active and long lived sultans were
former military slaves who had won support among the principal Mamluks.

As young men sold to a well established and often powerful personage
{amir, beg) the Mamluks lived in the households of their owners or else,
particularly if they belonged to the reigning sultan, in barracks. There they
were inducted into Islam and learned the military arts; those with linguistic
talent also studied Arabic. After manumission an ambitious warrior might
himself gather a household by raising slave boys as soldiers and ultimately
enter the competition for the sultanate.

For its perpetuation this system depended on a steady stream of military
slaves, in this instance from north of the Black Sea and the Caucasus region. In

spite of papal prohibitions Genoese dealers played a crucial role in this
trade.
Demand was increased by the fact that the newcomers were accustomed to
colder climates and often succumbed to infections against which they had not
gained any immunity: losses due to the factional struggles inherent in this
system also must have taken their toll. Ethnically these slaves were quite
diverse, but they adopted Turkish as their lingua franca and throughout the
existence of the Mamluk sultanate used Turkish personal names; in addition,
dignitaries were distinguished by Arabic titles.

Although high achievers in horsemanship, the Mamluks did not build a
navy or place any great emphasis on the deployment of firearms; this weak
ness among other matters allowed the Ottoman ruler Selrm I (r. 918 26/
1512 20) to overthrow the sultan of Egypt and Syria in a single campaign (922
3/1516 17). Under Ottoman rule Mamluks disappeared from Syria. However,
military slaves continued to be imported into Egypt throughout the period
under consideration and from the same regions as before, but now through
the agency of Ottoman slave traders. Marrying either women from their own
milieu or else Egyptians, the new arrivals formed a ruling group that devel
oped institutions of dominance so different from their medieval predecessors
that specialists nowadays play down the continuities between 'independent'
and 'Ottoman' Mamluk regimes. 15

Certain commanders built elaborate households that competed for power
on the local level, and while an independent sultanate was no longer an
option, the most successful heads of such units obtained key positions in

15 David Ayalon, 'Studies in al Jabarti I: Notes on the transformation of Mamluk society in
Egypt under the Ottomans', JESHO, 3 (i960); Jane Hathaway, The politics ofhouseholds in
Ottoman Egypt: The rise of the Qazdaghs (Cambridge, 1997).

local administration as well as in the military. By the late twelfth/ eighteenth
century Mamluk heads of households, by using their newly acquired military
slaves, had penetrated and ultimately evicted the Ottoman garrison troops,
which originally had been stationed in Egypt in order to control them. By the
same token, the ties of powerful twelfth/ eighteenth century begs to their
overlords in Istanbul had worn rather thin. In the long run the Mamluk
system in its different avatars led to a substantial immigration of Circassians
and other people from north of the Black Sea into Egypt.

The Mongol invasions

From the population historian's point of view, however, the migrations with
the most dramatic consequences were doubtless those of the Mongols and
other soldiers incorporated into the armies of the latter, who were often of
Turkish ethnicity. For previous immigrants, even if they plundered and
destroyed cities, as the Ghuzz had done in Nishapur (548/1153), ultimately
were prepared to collect taxes from town and countryside and govern with the
help of established urban elites. 1 However, this was not true of the Mongols,
at least not of the first wave that overran the Middle East apart from Egypt
during the seventh/thirteenth century. Mongol troops were virtually invin
cible due to their superior discipline and coordination; to maintain this
advantage, their leaders did not hesitate to engage in methodical mass murder

on a scale not previously seen in Middle Eastern warfare. The aim was to strike terror into the hearts of potential opponents, eliminate alternative elites
and in some cases also free land for the extensive breeding of livestock. The
figures of the dead and enslaved relayed in contemporary chronicles may not
be overly reliable. But as both partisans and opponents of the Mongols insisted
on the enormous scale of bloodshed the reality of such methical killing, which incidentally also was practised during the Mongol conquest of China, is
not itself in doubt. 17

Moreover, when entering Iran in the 620S/1220S these pastoralists and their
commanders apparently regarded the elaborate underground irrigation sys
terns (qanats) that were a precondition for agriculture in this arid territory as a
needless impediment to the pastoral life. In the first decades of Mongol

16 Carl F. Petty, The civilian elite of Cairo in the later Middle Ages (Princeton, 1981), pp. 61 2;
Richard Bulliet, The patricians of Nishapur (Cambridge, MA, 1972), pp. 76 9.

17 I. P. Petrushevsky, 'The socio economic condition of Iran under the II khans', in
J. A. Boyle (ed.), The Cambridge history of Iran, vol. V: The Saljuq and Mongol periods
(Cambridge, 1968).

316

Demography and migration

(Ilkhanid) domination in Iran the underground water channels were often destroyed. Attempts on the part of Ghazan Khan (r. 695 704/1295 1304) and

his vizier, the historian and patron of scholars Rashid al Din, to reverse this
policy and give limited protection to the taxpaying peasantry were only
moderately successful. For by this time petty provincial bosses, even though
they owed their positions to the Mongols, were often refractory to directions
from the centre. Agricultural recovery was also impeded by the fact that taxes
came to be completely unpredictable; it was common for the same tax to be
demanded more than once a year, or for several years in advance. Peasants in
Iran were regarded as serfs and considered bound to the soil; but the extreme
conditions under which they were forced to live resulted in both flight and
localised rebellions suppressed with much bloodshed. As a result even Ghazan
Khan and Rashid al Din were not able to increase rural revenues to a level
even approximating that of the years before 617/1220.

The conquests of Trmur (c. 736 807/1336 1405) took place in a different
socio political context: while he apparently aimed at resurrecting the Mongol
empire, this ruler was soon convinced that steppe territories brought in less
income than agricultural lands and cities. In Trmur' s own territories there was
thus no attempt to eliminate the settled population, although at least in Iran
the irregularity and brutality of rural taxation once again resulted in major
setbacks. But in areas belonging to his opponents Trmur used methods that
resembled those of his seventh/ thirteenth century Chinggisid predecessors,
including the systematic devastation of the Don Volga region, the sack of
Delhi and, albeit on a more limited scale, that of the Ottoman town of
Sivas. 1

Small-scale but significant:
the migrations of specialists

In spite of great differences between city dwellers, villagers and nomads,
between languages both spoken and written, between ordinary servants,

military slaves and free men, between royal courts and urban quarters,
Islamic civilisation had certain common traits that bound together regions
as diverse as northern India and Spain. Several factors favoured unity, but in
the present context what counts are the migrations of traders, artists, literary
men and religious scholars.

The activities of merchants trading over long distances out of Egypt during
the fifth /eleventh and sixth/twelfth centuries are relatively well documented

18 Beatrice Manz, The rise and rule of Tamerlane (Cambridge, 1989).

due to the papers found in the Cairo Geniza. 19 These texts were written by
Jews and thus highlight the activities of Jewish merchants. But partnerships
between Muslims and Jews were common enough to permit the conclusion
that many of the activities documented in the Geniza were also undertaken by
Muslims. We thus find traders who travelled with their goods and sedentary
merchants who entrusted their wares to others: given the frequent coopera
tion between Muslims and Jews, the relevant contracts were mostly con
eluded according to Islamic law. Merchants who left some of their records
in the Cairo Geniza occasionally travelled to Byzantium, the Italian ports or
Marseilles; but normally they circulated within the Islamic world. Before
the 440S/1050S that is, roughly before the disruptions connected with
the invasion of the Banu Hilal Tunisia and Sicily formed the hub of

Mediterranean trade; from here trans shipment to Spain usually took place.
Numerous boat connections also linked Egypt to Syrian ports; caravans criss
crossed Africa north of the Sahara.

In addition there was the trade through the Red Sea and the Indian Ocean,
which was to remain a mainstay of Cairo's merchants well into the twelfth/
eighteenth century. 20 For throughout the long period covered by this chapter,
Cairo was a major entrepot for South Asian goods: merchants travelling to
India typically returned to this city and there sold their goods to traders
arriving from the entire Mediterranean region. Some of the Cairo merchants
engaged in the Indian trade might form such close links to the subcontinent
that they even acquired workshops in the latter location. Moreover, in the
Fatimid period there emerged a coterie of ship owners, first known as
al Karim, who minimised the risks inherent in Red Sea traffic by sailing in
convoy. In the Mamluk period this group, now known as Karimi, mutated into
a conglomerate of potent merchant families closely linked by intermarriage,
who down to the early 800s /1400s all but monopolised trade with India.

Contacts with China were more intermittent; yet the Moroccan world
traveller Ibn Battuta (703 70/1304 68 or 779/1377) states that he encountered
flourishing Muslim communities on the Chinese coast. 21 The first traders from

19 S. D. Goitein, A Mediterranean society: The Jewish communities of the Arab world as portrayed
in the documents of the Cairo Geniza, 6 vols. (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1967 93), vol. I:
Economic foundations (Berkeley, 1967), pp. 70 4, 148 61, 209 14.

20 S. D. Goitein, 'Letters and documents on the India trade in medieval times' and 'The
beginnings of the Karim merchants and the nature of their organization', both in
S. D. Goitein, Studies in Islamic history and institutions (Leiden, 1966).

21 Ross Dunn, The adventures of Ibn Battuta: A Muslim traveler of the 14th century (Berkeley
and Los Angeles, 1986), pp. 241 65. Whether Ibn Battuta actually visited China or
collected his information elsewhere is not of any great relevance in our context.

Demography and migration

the Islamic world had already reached China in the second/ eighth century;
and between the fourth/tenth and seventh/thirteenth centuries emperors of
the Sung dynasty encouraged both the trade of indigenous Chinese with India
and the settlement of foreign Muslims in their domains. Moreover, Chinese
engaged in international trade often converted to Islam. Once the Mongols
had taken over the Sung empire they continued these policies if anything
more energetically; the advantages of Islamic traders only ended with the
Ming dynasty's takeover after 769/1368. At the time of Ibn Battuta's visit
Muslim trading communities, which might or might not contain immigrants,
could be found in many inland cities of China as well.

Artists were another group whose members travelled widely and often
settled in places far from the localities where they had been born. Our
information concerns mainly painters of miniatures, as from the ninth/
fifteenth century onwards it was common to record the names and places of
origin of the masters who had illustrated a given volume. Miniature painting
often being a courtly art, painters might not find employment in their places of
residence once a given patron had died or was no longer in a position to
sponsor them. 2,2 Conversely, if a centre of miniature painting was captured by
an invader the new ruler might carry off the artists he found on site to

continue their work in his own capital. Thus the Ottoman sultan Selim I brought a number of masters from Tabriz to Istanbul, after he had occupied the former residence of his defeated rival Shah Isma'il I (r. 907 30/1501 2.4). Registers of court artists still recorded the presence of the Iranians and that of their descendants quite a few years after the sultan's death. 23 Yet only a few years earlier, after the Timurid regime of Husayn Bayqara had been over thrown by the Uzbeks, quite a few painters had sought refuge at the court of the young Shah Isma'il I. It is thus quite possible that some of these artists were obliged to travel the enormous distance, overland, from Herat to Istanbul.

But the greatest patrons of miniature painting were the Indian courts, first in the sultanate of Delhi and from the tenth/ sixteenth century onwards the Mughal emperors. In the Indian context paintings in books were also spon sored with relative frequency by non royal patrons. This created opportunities for artists from Iran, who either travelled themselves or else received Indian students who thus visited the Safavid empire for lengthy periods of time. Where the imperial court was concerned, Humayun (r., with an interruption,

22 Norah M. Titley, Persian miniature painting and its influence on the art of Turkey and India:
The British Library collections (Austin, 1983 4).

23 Ismail Hakki Uzuncjarsrii, 'Osmanli saraymda EM i Hiref (Sanatkarlar) Defteri', Belgeler,
11, 15 (1986).

319

937 63/1530 56), son of the Mughal conqueror Babur, encouraged Iranian
artists, whose work he had come to admire when as a political exile he
spent time at the court of the shah. By contrast, a ninth /fifteenth century
ruler of Kashmir sent artists and artisans to Iran for the completion of their
training. 24

Among the men of religion, some Sufis were great travellers, including Ibn
al 'Arabi, who spent his life criss crossing al Andalus, Morocco, Tunisia,
Anatolia and Syria, to say nothing of two pilgrimages to Mecca. 25 Systematic
research has been undertaken on the civilian elite in Cairo during the later
Mamluk period: the data are best for the domains controlled by these sultans
themselves, in other words the Nile Valley and Syria. 2 Syrian scholars who
had gained a reputation in their home country might receive invitations to
lecture in Cairo. A respectable number of scholars and other notable immi
grants from Iran were also on record, probably at least in part due to the
political instability of the latter region. The sources are not so ample on
scholars and other highly qualified people from the Ottoman empire who
made careers in Cairo; most of them probably were not under as much
pressure to emigrate as their Iranian colleagues. In some cases they also
may not as yet have possessed the training necessary to succeed in Cairo's
highly competitive environment. Yet incidental evidence, for instance on the
Sufi, religious scholar and possibly political rebel Bedr el Din of Simavna
(760 819/1358 1416), who first studied in Cairo and then became tutor to a
Mamluk prince, shows that Ottoman scholars were not completely absent
either. 27

The Ottoman administration as a collector of data

When passing into the Ottoman realm, with its relatively extensive records of
taxpayers, we enter the proto statistical age. The sultans' conquest of Anatolia

and the Balkans during the 700s /1300s and 800s /1400s and of geographical
Syria, Egypt, Iraq and Cyprus after about 905/1500 has in many cases provided
us, for the first time in Middle Eastern history, with reasonably well kept
registers covering entire provinces (tahrif). These lists of taxpayers and settle
ments both urban and rural, of which samples survive for the 800s /1400s but

24 Titley, Persian miniature painting, p. 211.
25 Ahmed Ate§, 'Ibn al Arabi', Eh, vol. Ill, p. 707.
26 Petry, The civilian elite, pp. 39 83.
27 Hans Joachim Kissling, 'Badr al Din b. Kadi Samawna, Eh, vol. I, p.

320

Demography and migration

which become abundant in the tenth/ sixteenth century, were intended to
facilitate the collection of a whole array of dues in money and in kind. The
taxes collected, often corresponding to those recorded in Ilkhanid Iran, were
then distributed as revocable revenue grants to military men and administra
tors, while a significant share was retained by the ruler himself.

In an ideal world these records should have been regularly brought up to
date. Not that this principle was always adhered to, and many registers must
have been lost; yet they do survive in their hundreds for Anatolia, the Balkans
and geographical Syria. Summary registers (ijmal), based on the detailed
listings prepared on site, sometimes provided supplementary information:
remarkably enough, for purposes that we may surmise were 'proto statistical',

they enumerated tax exempt servitors of the Ottoman administration and also
employees of sultanic pious foundations, who strictly speaking did not have a
place in tax registers.

When tax farming became a major mode of revenue collection in the early
iooos/late 1500s early 1600s the costly preparation of tahrirs was given up
except in newly conquered provinces. In areas where non Muslim populations
remained numerous, especially in south eastern Europe, records concerning
the poll tax (jizye) have been used as sources for demographic history. But the
particular problems posed by jizye records have not all been solved as yet.
Muslim populations can only be accessed through the records of a tax known
as the l ovarii, which started out as an irregular wartime levy but by the 1000s/
1600s was collected annually. In some regions taxpayers were recorded
individually, and this makes the relevant registers appear rather like latter
day tahrirs; but this was by no means the case everywhere, so that on quite a
few regions we lack data for the period between the early iooos/late 1500s and
the early fourteenth/later nineteenth century.

To arrive at estimates of the total population on the basis of taxation records
we need to know something about average household size, which is usually
not the case. By convention it is often assumed that there were five people to
a household. In addition, where the population of large areas, but not of
individual cities, is concerned, numerous observations concerning age pyr
amids admittedly of later periods allow us to say that males over roughly
fifteen years of age who alone were obliged to pay taxes generally made up
between one quarter and one third of the total population. 2 Thus multiplying
the taxpayers by quotients of three and four gives us the relevant upper and

28 Leila Erder, 'The measurement of pre industrial population changes: The Ottoman
empire from the 15th to the 17th century', Middle Eastern Studies, 11 (1975).

lower limits; and often the estimate based on a household multiplier of five
results in figures situated within these boundaries. It is generally considered
that, when dealing with cities, the estimated number of taxpayers should be
increased by 20 per cent to account for tax exempt garrison soldiers and other
servitors of the sultan. 29 In major centres such as Cairo or Istanbul, average
household size may have been larger due to the presence of numerous upper
class families served by large numbers of slaves.

These data have been generated and interpreted in numerous monographs
on individual towns and provinces of the Ottoman realm. But attempts to
systematically map population and estimate the totals for large areas are still
few and far between. The only published population map of Ottoman south
eastern Europe excluding Istanbul dates from the late 1360S/1940S: on the
basis of summary registers compiled about 937/1520, it shows the Islamisation
of much of the eastern Balkans which, however, were thinly populated at
this time. 30 By contrast, the western half was more densely settled, and it was
here that the Christian population was concentrated. Many Balkan towns,
especially the more important ones, had Muslim majorities; and in the two

largest centres Christians were but a small minority. In Edirne, the Ottoman
capital between the late 700S/1300S and the reign of Mehmed the Conqueror
(r. 848 50/1444 6 and 855 86/1451 81), Muslims numbered about three
quarters of the total, while in Salonika, at this time apparently the largest
Balkan city outside Istanbul, over half the population was Jewish. The Jews
must have been recent arrivals who had come to the Ottoman lands after their
expulsion from Spain in 897/1492.

Unfortunately this map does not reflect the major event in the demographic
history of this time, namely the resettlement of Istanbul by immigrants, both
forced and more or less voluntary. Subjects of the sultans, especially those
from newly conquered provinces, were drafted for relocation in the new
capital. Refugees also arrived from outside the Ottoman borders; apart from
the Jews we also encounter Muslims who received a separate mosque in the
Istanbul port of Galata.

In recent publications we find a number of detailed maps showing the
distributions of settlement in several Anatolian provinces; unfortunately they

29 Omer Liitfi Barkan, 'Essai sur les donnees statistiques des registres de recensement dans
l'Empire ottoman aux XVe et XVIe siecles', Journal of the Economic and Social History of
the Levant, 1 (1958).

30 Omer Liitfi Barkan, 'XVI. Asnn Basinda Rumeli'de Niifusun Yayilis Tarzim Gosterir
Harita', Istanbul Universitesi Iktisat Fakiiltesi Mecmuasi, in (1949 50).

522

Demography and migration

contain no data on population size. 31 Nor have any attempts at synthesising
population data been undertaken for Anatolia and Syria; this is doubtless
connected to the fact that today's historians are more sceptical about the
accuracy of the tahrirs than was true of Barkan and other scholars of his
generation. Today interest focuses on the possibility of calculating total
agricultural production on the basis of the data concerning rural taxes also
included in the tahrir and on the always problematic relationship between
population data and estimated crops. 31 In this context, handling data for
limited regions, a few districts or sub provinces at a time has usually been
preferred.

No Ottoman population data are available for Egypt and the provinces
of western North Africa; by contrast, they are relatively abundant for 'geo
graphical Syria' in other words, the region between Aleppo in the north and
al 'Arish in the south. It appears that Aleppo, the third city of the Ottoman
empire after Istanbul and Cairo, after an early period of crisis recorded by the
tahrirs grew during the later tenth/ sixteenth and also the eleventh/ seven
teenth centuries: a growth rate of about 40 per cent has been assumed as the
city increased from approximately 80,000 in 944/i537f to 115,000 shortly
before 1094/ 1683. While the core of the city remained fairly stable, growth
was concentrated in the suburbs. 33 In the case of Damascus it has been
suggested that the construction of major Ottoman monuments on the out
skirts of the Mamluk city indicated increasing urbanisation of previously semi
rural territories; it has also been proposed that the city had about 52,000
inhabitants in the early tenth/ sixteenth century and grew to 90,000 by 1214/
1800. 34 Certainly the countryside of northern Syria experienced fairly serious
fluctuations in population, including a significant decline in the twelfth/

31 For the data used by Barkan and his collaborators, now published, see
ismet Binark et al,

(eds.), 438 Numarah Muhdsebe i Vilayet i Anadolu Defteri (937/1530), 2 vols. (Ankara, 1994);
Ismet Binark et al. (eds.), 166 Numarah Muhdsebe i Vilayet i Anadolu Defteri (937/1530),
2 vols. (Ankara, 1995); Ismet Binark et al. (eds.), 387 Numarah Muhdsebe i Vilayet i Karaman
ve Rum Defteri (937/1530), 2 vols. (Ankara, 1996); Ahmet Ozkilinc et al. (eds.), 998 Numarah
Muhdsebe i Vilayet i Diydr i Bekr ve 'Arab ve Zil'l kadriyye Defteri (937/1530), 2 vols. (Ankara,
1999). For a critical evaluation see Heath Lowry, 'The Ottoman Tahrir Defterleri as a
source for social and economic history: Pitfalls and limitations', in Heath Lowry, Studies
in defterology: Ottoman society in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries (Istanbul, 1992).

32 Huri Islamoglu inan, State and peasant in the Ottoman empire: Agrarian power relations and
regional economic development in Ottoman Anatolia during the sixteenth century (Leiden,
1994); Nenad Moacanin, Town and country on the Middle Danube, 1526 1690 (Leiden, 2005).

33 Andre Raymond, 'The population of Aleppo in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries
according to Ottoman census documents', IJMES, 16 (1984).

34 Andre Raymond, 'The Ottoman conquest and the development of the great Arab towns',
International Journal ofi Turkish Studies, 1 (1979 80); Antoine Abdel Nour, Introduction a
Vhistoire urbaine de la Syrie ottomane (XVIe XVIIIe siccle) (Beirut, 1982), pp. 72 4.

323

The New Cambridge History of Islam

eighteenth century; but Aleppo and Damascus received so many immigrants

from rural areas that even major losses due to plague and other epidemics
were soon compensated. 35

Making sense of tahnr data

Ever since the 1380s /1960s the delicate balance between population and food
resources has been a subject of debate. 36 In this context certain scholars have
tried to determine whether the growth of population documented in the tahrirs of the 900S/1500S led to population pressure, in other words to a decline of per capita grain supplies to the point where holdings were sub divided into non viable parts and poor quality lands ploughed up. Michael Cook has concluded that at least in certain parts of Anatolia, such pressure did
occur. By contrast, Huri islamoglu Inan has strongly disagreed, pointing to
the extra gains from rural industries that might flourish, especially if the population was increasing fast.

The next question is whether this pressure may, as Mustafa Akdag had suggested, have made it difficult for young men to find the wherewithal for
marriage, unattached young males being prime candidates for migration to
the cities and enrolment in the sultan's armies. Emphasising the 'pull' rather
than the 'push' factors, Halil Inalcik has proposed instead that it was military
change rather than rural population pressure that resulted in many young
men leaving their villages to join the sultans' armies. For around 1009/1600,
with the declining importance of cavalry in battle, the sultans had begun to
hire musket wielding mercenaries for single campaigns only. 37 Last but not
least, there is always the possibility that some increases were not 'real' at all,
but merely due to the higher quality of late tenth/ sixteenth century counts as
opposed to their predecessors from the early 900s /1500s.

Debate also has focused upon the question whether in areas other than those studied by Cook and Islamoglu Inan, and indeed in Anatolia as a whole,

population pressure was or could have been an issue. A clear cut answer
is

35 Abdel Nour, Introduction, passim.

36 Mustafa Akdag, Celdli Isyanlan (yyo 1603J (Ankara, 1963); Michael A.
Cook, Population
pressure in rural Anatolia 14S0 1600 (London and New York, 1972);
Oktay Ozel,
'Population changes in Anatolia during the 16th and 17th centuries',
IJMES, 36 (2004);
Mehmet Oz, 'Population fall in seventeenth century Anatolia: Some
findings for the
districts of Canik and Bozok', Archivum Ottomanicum, 22 (2004).

37 Halil Inalcik, 'Military and fiscal transformation in the Ottoman
empire, 1600 1700',
Archivum Ottomanicum, 6 (1980); Karen Barkey, Bandits and
bureaucrats: Tfte Ottoman
route to state centralization (Ithaca and London, 1994).

324

Demography and migration

impossible. But if we keep in mind that certain potentially fertile lands
such as
the Cukurova in southern Anatolia were still heavily forested in the late
tenth/
sixteenth century, it is difficult to assume overall population pressure,
what
ever the situation may have been in certain regions close to the major
cities
and trade routes. In the same way it is worth noting that so many people
who were settled in Cyprus by the sultan's orders after the Ottoman
conquest
(978 9/1570 1) quickly returned to the Anatolian mainland; while
conditions
peculiar to Cyprus may partly explain this phenomenon, it is hardly an
argument in favour of population pressure. 38

In spite of numerous conflicts over tax collection and a spate of climatic disasters, the Ottoman world knew no peasant uprisings of the type encoun
tered in both early modern Europe and China. This absence has also formed
the subject of some debate. The high level of legitimacy enjoyed by the sultans
as champions of Islam may have had a part to play. Moreover, in spite of needing the permission of local administrators before they could legally move, in practice many young men found it easy to escape from whatever tensions were being generated in village life around 1009 /1600. 39 Migration
into the towns might be a solution of sorts, and, as we have seen, joining the sultans' armies also functioned as a safety valve. Given the distances covered by Ottoman armies and the likelihood that some mercenaries might detach themselves from their units somewhere along the road, this movement of military men into border provinces also can be viewed as a type
of migration.

These debates are of special relevance for our understanding of Ottoman social structure: for while peasant uprisings were conspicuous by their absence, the early eleventh/late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries
saw a series of major mercenary revolts that laid waste large sections of Anatolia. Had these rebels been pushed out of the villages by population pressure, as an indirect and unintended consequence of military change, or
for some other reason? The debate will probably continue for some time to
come.

38 Ronald Jennings, Christians and Muslims in Ottoman Cyprus and the Mediterranean world
(New York, 1993), pp. 212 39; §enol Celik, 'Turk fethi sonrasmda Kibns Adasina yonelik
iskan calismalan', in Zehra Toska (ed.), KafDagintn otesine varmak, Festschrift in honor of
Giinay Kut: Essays presented by her colleagues and students, 3 vols. (Cambridge, MA, 2003),
vol. 1/ Journal of Turkish Studies 27, 1 3.

39 Islamoglu Inan, State and peasant, pp. 155 6; Suraiya Faroqhi, 'Political tensions in the
Anatolian countryside around 1600: An attempt at interpretation', in J. L. Bacque

Grammont, Barbara Flemming, Macit Gokberk and ilber Ortayli (eds.),
Turkische
Miszellen: Robert Anhegger Festschrift, Armagam, Melanges (Istanbul,
1987).

325

Anatolian nomads in the course of settlement

Rainfall agriculture is possible throughout the Ottoman Balkans and
present
day Turkey, even though the core of central Anatolia is marginal for
today's
farmers. Thus, unlike Iraq or Iran no elaborate irrigation arrangements
were
necessary whose neglect or destruction might render the affected area
unfit
for cultivation on a long term basis. This situation also explains in part
why
Anatolian and Balkan nomads of the 900s /1500s showed a certain
propensity
to settle down, or at least this is the impression conveyed by the tahrirs.
40
Some scepticism certainly is in order, for Ottoman officials saw
themselves as
governing an empire of settled folk. Thus quite possibly certain districts
of
'peasants' we encounter in the tax registers of the later 900S/1500S may
have
been the products of administrative convenience and wishful thinking
rather
than resulting from real processes of settlement. But even so, the
population
growth of the tenth/ sixteenth century must have pushed many Anatolian
and
Balkan nomads into village life and, by the same token, the percentage of
people who could not evade registration must have been higher than had
been
true in an earlier, less settled age.

In the early noos/late 1600s the Ottoman central government was hard
pressed for revenue due to a lengthy war against the Habsburgs (1094
1110/
1683 99). In consequence the authorities made their first concerted
efforts to
actually force nomads to settle. Officials had by now realised that on the
margins of the Syrian deserts agriculture was in retreat because villagers
were
not being protected against the raids of desert nomads. 41 The official
plan was
that mainly Turkish speaking tribesmen were to be settled in south
eastern
Anatolia and what is today northern Iraq; these people would hopefully
retain
their warlike qualities and form a barrier against incursions from the
desert. 42
But, even though an effort was made to obtain the support of the leaders
of the
tribal units involved, the project failed, in part because many sites chosen
for
settlement were important militarily but not very suitable for farming.
Moreover, the former nomads were not given any funds to tide them over
the first few years. Yet the latter are invariably difficult because
throughout
the world in such situations, animals are lost before agricultural yields
are
sufficient for subsistence. As a result the ex nomads soon abandoned
their

40 De Planhol, Les fondements geograpkiqu.es, pp. 225 41.

41 Wolf Dieter Hiitteroth and Kamal Abdulfattah, Historical geography of
Palestine,
Transjordan and southern Syria in the late 16th century (Erlangen,
1977).

42 Cengiz Orhonlu, Osmanh Imparatorlugunda asiretleri iskdn
te^ebbusu (1691 1696) (Istanbul,
1963).

Demography and migration

villages and now, without sufficient sheep and camels, they became more dangerous to the farming population. However, during the twelfth/ eight eenth century the Ottoman central administration did not give up, and campaigns to settle nomads were frequently undertaken. 43

Migrations under state control

Nomads chose their routes themselves, and that was a major reason why they
were regarded as such problematic subjects by Ottoman officialdom. On the
other hand, there were migrations actually commanded by sultans and their
bureaucrats; in the 800S/1400S and earlier 900S/1500S the aim was usually to
populate newly conquered regions or cities with loyal subjects Muslims, but
also non Muslims on occasion or else to neutralise local elites by settling
them in regions where they had no sources of power independent from their
government grants. 44 As we have seen, artists or artisans in newly conquered
regions, such as Tabriz (920/1514) or Egypt (922/1517) were sometimes
ordered to move to Istanbul and serve the court. These settlers were consid
ered to have been banished (siirgiin) and thus apparently suffered a loss in
status, though otherwise they retained the rights of free men and women.
Istanbul was thus settled by Anatolians drafted by local authorities who had
been ordered to provide pre established quotas of recruits, or else by inhab
itants of newly conquered towns to the north of the Black Sea. 45 In the villages
surrounding the capital prisoners of war were settled, who for a while retained
certain characteristics of their former slave status. 46 The last major project of
this kind was undertaken after the conquest of Cyprus from the Venetians

(978 9/1570 1); it was officially considered a failure, and later conquests such
as Crete were not settled under state supervision.

Siirgiin were expected to remain in the places to which they had been
assigned; but there were also state controlled migrations of artisans who were

43 Yusuf Halacoglu, XVIII. Yiizyilda Osmanh Imparatorlugunun iskdn siyaseti ve asiretlerin
yerlestirilmesi (Ankara, 1988).

44 Omer Liitfi Barkan, 'Osmanh Imparatorlugunda bir iskan ve kolonizasyon metodu
olarak siirgiinler', Istanbul Universitesi Iktisat Fakiiltesi Mecmuast, 11, 1 4 (1949 50), 13, 1 4
(1951 2.), 15, 1 4 (i953 4)-

45 Halil Inalcik, 'The policy of Mehmed II toward the Greek population of Istanbul
and the Byzantine buildings of the city', Dumbarton Oaks Papers, 23 (1969 70); Nicoara
Beldiceanu, 'La conquete des cites marchandes de Kilia et de Cetatea Alba par Bayezid
II', repr. in Nicoara Beldiceanu, he monde ottoman des Balkans (1402 i;66): Institutions,
societe, economic (London, 1976), VI.

46 Stefan Yerasimos, '15. ytizyilm sonunda Haslar Kazasi', in Tiilay Artan (ed.), 18. yiizyil
kadi sicilleri isiginda Eyiip'te sosyal yasam (Istanbul, 1998), pp. 82 102.

327

meant to work on state projects for a limited period of time, and return to
their provinces of origin once the latter had been completed. This manner of
recruitment was practised throughout the early modern period, but has been

studied mostly for the great palace and mosque building projects of the
tenth/ sixteenth century. 47 Judges and provincial administrators were
required
to locate the most skilful craftsmen and convey them to Istanbul or to the
relevant provincial construction site, sometimes under guard. At least in
Istanbul during slack periods these men probably found work with
private
employers as well; some of them may have been migrant workers to
begin
with. How many of these craftsmen stayed on in the capital once their
work
was finished remains unknown. A great deal must have depended on the
number of projects under way and also the workmen already available in
Istanbul.

However, some of the major Ottoman artists of the tenth/ sixteenth and
early eleventh/ seventeenth centuries had not started their careers as
appren
tices in provincial towns, but had been drafted into the sultans' service
through the so called 'levy of boys' (devsirme). This was a forcible
recruitment
of Christian village youths into the Janissary corps and, for those who
showed
extraordinary promise, into the service of the rulers' palace. This
procedure
must count as a special case of migration as many of the boys concerned
moved over considerable distances; and at some point in their careers
quite a
few of them came to be stationed in Istanbul.

Some successful recruits were also active in the artistic and technical
sectors. Thus Sinan (c. 895 996/1490 1588), later the architect who built
the
Suleymaniye and SelTmiye mosque complexes in Istanbul and Edirne,
began
his career as a Janissary officer and military engineer. 48 Mehmed Aga,
the
architect of the mosque complex of Sultan Ahmed I (r. 1012 26/1603 17)
had
entered the palace as a page and held a military command in Syria
before
specialising in architecture. Globally speaking, the artists and craftsmen
recruited by the Ottoman sultans formed only one example of the
numerous
movements of this kind that occurred throughout the Islamic world. But
due
to the strongly centralised character of the Ottoman state, recruitment
was

47 Omer Lutfi Barkan, Suleymaniye Cami ve Imareti in$aati, 2 vols. (Ankara, 1972 9); Giilru
Necipoglu, Architecture, ceremonial and power: The Topkapx Palace in tfte fifteenth and
sixteenth centuries (Cambridge, MA, and London, 1991), pp. 232 4; Suraiya Faroqhi,
'Under state control: Sixteenth and seventeenth century Ottoman craftsmen on their
way to Istanbul', in Suraiya Faroqhi, Stories of Ottoman men and women: Establishing
status, establishing control (Istanbul, 2002).

48 Giilru Necipoglu, The age of Sinan: Architectural culture in the Ottoman empire (London,
2005), pp. 127 52.

328

Demography and migration

more systematic than elsewhere; moreover, we know more about the move
ments of artists and artisans due to the survival of the central archives.

The plague and harvest failures

Some information is available concerning the demographic effects of the
plague in Syria and Egypt during the Mamluk period. 49 In these regions
apparently the pneumonic variety was frequent, while the contrary seems
to have applied in the western European setting; as a result the long term
consequences were more serious, as due to the extremely high mortality it
became difficult for the affected populations to reproduce themselves
between epidemics. As a contributing cause, the flea most likely to cause
contagion in the Egyptian setting feeds on grain husks and similar debris.

Moreover, overtaxed peasants often took the opportunity to flee their villages
and take refuge in the cities. Thus the abandonment of cultivation in many
rural areas might lead to major scarcities in spite of a diminished number of
consumers. Higher population densities in the cities also made for a greater
incidence of contagion; and there survives a good deal of evidence that people
fled those cities that were worst affected. Remarkably, given the standard
advice of Muslim men of religion to not flee from a place where the plague
had broken out, some scholars of this time openly advocated flight. 50

For the plagues of Cairo during the late eighth/fourteenth and throughout
the ninth/ fifteenth centuries we possess some official data relayed by con
temporary chroniclers; however, they concern only those people with taxable
estates, and exclude inmates of a major urban hospital as well as the corpses
found in the public thoroughfares. These figures show that children and
slaves, especially the females among the latter, were worst affected. Some
chroniclers of the time have preceded modern historians in using these figures
as the basis of an estimate of total mortality. In addition, Ibn Taghribirdi, the
author of an important chronicle, counted the coffins prayed over in one of
Cairo's oratories and then multiplied that number by that of all known
oratories in the city. This latter method was sometimes also used by govern
ment officials who probably wanted to estimate future revenue shortfalls. 51

As in other parts of the early modern world, the plague was a major
determinant of population size in the Ottoman realm; this was particularly

49 Michael Dols, The Black Death in the Middle East (Princeton, 1977), pp. 143 235.

50 Ibid., p. 175.

51 Ibid., pp. 175 83.

true of Istanbul. In the tenth/ sixteenth and early eleventh/seventeenth cen
turies the denizens of the Ottoman empire must have suffered losses com
parable to those that afflicted populations in the western Mediterranean
region; however, evidence on this period is sparse. But after the 1070S/1660S
major epidemics disappeared from Spain, France and Italy, apart from the
murderous epidemic in Marseilles (1132/ 1720), which incidentally had
been brought in by a ship arriving from an infected port of the eastern
Mediterranean. However, until the beginning of the thirteenth/nineteenth
century plague epidemics remained a major problem in the eastern regions of
Anatolia and also in Epirus, today the borderland between Greece and
Albania. In Istanbul apparently the local rodents had become infected to
such an extent that plague became endemic: throughout the twelfth/ eight
eenth century epidemics in Alexandria were often initiated by ships arriving
from the Ottoman capital. By contrast, epidemics in Izmir were often caused
by bacilli arriving with the silk caravans from western Iran, as these had to pass
through a territory where there were also sizeable populations of infected
rodents. 52

Where reactions to the plague were concerned, the social disorganisation
so often witnessed in Christian countries during major epidemics was much
less dramatic in the Ottoman lands. In these territories Muslims generally
obeyed the religious command to not leave the region in which they found

themselves at the time a plague broke out. The corollary was an injunction to
not enter places where the infection was known to be raging; and Mehmed the
Conqueror is known to have followed this advice when on campaign. 53 Visits
to the sick and attendance at funerals continued as in the case of other
illnesses. However, in the late ninth/ sixteenth century it was claimed, with
what degree of justification remains unknown, that the plague had never
affected the sultans' palace; if true, this fortunate situation may have been
linked to the custom of immediately sending all sick palace inmates to a
hospital located a good distance away from the main buildings. 54

Wealthy non Muslims and Europeans resident in Ottoman port towns
normally left the urban perimeter and stayed in rural villas for the duration
of the plague. Those who had to remain typically locked themselves in and

52 Daniel Panzac, La peste dans {'empire Ottoman, 1700 i8jo (Louvain, 1985).

53 Heath Lowry, 'Pushing the stone uphill: The impact of bubonic plague on Ottoman
urban society in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries', Osmanli Arasttrmalart: The Journal
of Ottoman Studies, 23 (2004), p. 129.

54 Andreas Tietze (ed.), Mustafa 'Alt's counsel for sultans of 1581, 2 vols. (Vienna, 1979 82),
vol. I, p. 38.

330

Demography and migration

carefully fumigated all parcels received from the outside; these measures were
considered relatively effective. 55 Moreover, Muslims also migrated to summer
pastures or else to gardens outside the towns during the summer season, quite
independently of any epidemics. This latter custom pushed down the level of
congestion, and may well have served to limit infection. From the twelfth/
eighteenth century onwards certain upper class Muslims, particularly the begs
of Tunis, also convinced themselves that quarantines could be an effective
protection, and began to enforce them in their respective domains.

As to harvest failures and the famines and mortalities that must have
resulted from them, our information is very sparse and needs to be teased
out of a variety of disparate sources. However, we do know that the harvest
failures of the 990S/1590S, well documented in many parts of Mediterranean
Europe, also occurred in Anatolia and Syria. The reason was a succession of
serious droughts demonstrated by dendrochronological evidence; these cata
strophes may have contributed to the abandonment of many central Anatolian
villages, along with the better known mercenary rebellions of that period. 56 In
the coastlands of the Black Sea, where over the centuries the grain supply for
Istanbul was purchased at artificially low prices imposed by the Ottoman state,
few resources probably remained for agricultural investment. But whether
this situation was the root cause of the scarcities that plagued Istanbul during
the early 1200s /late 1700s or whether these were mainly caused by wartime
disruption as yet remains unknown. Further work on records of the late
twelfth/eighteenth and early thirteenth/nineteenth centuries probably will
elucidate at least some of these problems in the not too distant future.

55 Panzac, La peste, pp. 312 27.

56 Peter I. Kuniholm, 'Archaeological evidence and non evidence for climatic change',
Philosophical Transactions of the Royal Society, A330 (1990).

331

II

The mechanisms of commerce

WARREN C. SCHULTZ

Introduction"

In the field of English language scholarship on Islamic history in the 1960s,
when the first Cambridge history of Islam was planned and executed, economic
history was usually taken to mean the consideration of topics related to
agriculture, taxation and trade both international and local. 1 The editors of
the CHI certainly thought economic history was important. In the context of
setting the stage for the rest of the work, P. M. Holt wrote the following in the
introduction:

In the space of nearly two hundred years that have elapsed since Gibbon
wrote, the Renaissance, the Reformation and the Enlightenment have them
selves passed into history, and new forces have emerged in the development
of European society ... At the same time, the methods of historical study have
continued to evolve. The source materials available for research have
immensely increased, and the range of techniques at the historian's disposal
has been extended. The aims of the historian have changed in response to

both of these factors. Where the pioneers in the field sought primarily to construct, from the best sources they could find, the essential framework of
political history, and to chronicle as accurately as possible the acts of rulers,
historians today are more conscious of the need to evaluate their materials a
critique all the more important in Islamic history since the control supplied by
archives is so largely deficient. They seek to penetrate the dynastic screen, to
trace the real sites and shifts of power in the capitals and the camps, and to
identify, not merely the leaders or figure heads, but the ethnic, religious, social or economic groups of anonymous individuals who supported con stituted authority or promoted subversion. It is no longer possible, therefore,

1 P. M. Holt et al. (eds.), The Cambridge history of Islam, 2 vols. (Cambridge, 1970): hence

forth CHI.

332

The mechanisms of commerce

to segregate the political history of Islam from its social and economic history although in the latter field especially materials are notably sparse over
wide regions and long periods. 1 (emphasis added)

There were two important topics identified here. The first was that eco nomic aspects of life in the pre modern Islamic world were recognised as important and were therefore included in the work. The second was that economic history in particular was bedevilled by a paucity of sources.

Despite this endorsement of the need to incorporate economic aspects
into the wider narratives of Islamic history, the subsequent chapters of
CHI
that addressed regional narrative histories were relatively barren of
economic
themes, with the exception of the chapter on Egypt and Syria. 3 This was
probably due in part, of course, to the realities imposed by the second
theme
the problem of lack of sources outside Egypt. Moreover, when economic
themes were mentioned they were usually in the context of international
trade, a brief discussion of agriculture or taxation, or the citing of a
particularly
well known coin reform. Not surprisingly, given the wider goals of the
CHI,
there was little development of focused questions such as how economic
transactions were actually conducted. 4 Thus, the main contribution to
eco
nomic history in the CHI, the thematic chapter by Claude Cahen entitled
'Economy, society, institutions', was an essay written in broad strokes,
addressing in turn each of the three terms of its title. 5 Two important
emphases emerged from this chapter, however, and while the first
addressed
an issue that was perhaps of greater concern at the time refuting the
conception of the Islamic world's economic practices as hide bound and
unchanging the second, an important reminder of the gap that often
existed
between normative theory and actual practice when it came to economic
realities, is just as pertinent today as when Cahen wrote it. The chapter
did
not, however, contain any in depth discussions of commercial activities.

It is this question of how commercial activities were conducted by what
means was business transacted that is the subject of this chapter on the
mechanisms of commerce, concentrating on developments since the
publica
tion of the CHI. What is meant by the phrase 'mechanisms of commerce'?

2 P. M. Holt, 'Introduction', in ibid., vol. IA, p. xvii.

3 Bernard Lewis, 'Egypt and Syria', in ibid., vol. IA, pp. 175 230.

4 The holistic approach sought by the work was also emphasised by Holt:
'The aim of
these volumes is to present the history of Islam as a cultural whole. It is
hoped that in a
single, concise work the reader will be able to follow all the main
threads: political,

theological, philosophical, economic, military, artistic': ibid., vol. IA, p. ix.

5 Claude Cahen, 'Economy, society, institutions', in ibid., vol. IIB, pp. 511 38, 900 1.

The New Cambridge History of Islam

By this I mean the mechanisms numismatic, financial, legal that made it possible to conduct economic transactions. The chapter asks: What were these mechanisms of commerce and did they change over time? How do we know about them? What do we need to know about them in order to understand them? The fact that it is possible to ask these questions and provide at least partial answers tells us that the state of the economic history of the Islamic world has advanced considerably since the CHI was published. Not only have many new sources of information been brought to light, historians have also engaged in thorough discussions of the theoretical approaches to how that information could be used and understood.

Background

This relative paucity of economic history in the CHI was reflective of the state of the field up to that time. While specialised studies were emerging (see below), economic issues had not yet emerged as significant features in any of the era's standard surveys. If anything, there was a nod towards the impor tance of merchants and the existence of long distance trade. Occasionally,

events such as the Umayyad caliph 'Abd al Malik's revolutionary coin
reforms
of the seventh century would be mentioned. Some important numismatic
work had occurred in the publication of catalogues and corpora, but for
the
most part coins remained in their own little corner of academia. Few
scholars
had attempted to break down the barriers between those fields of study.

In general, political or intellectual history was dominant, as the following
brief survey reveals. C. Brockelmann, in his History of the Islamic
peoples,
mentioned economic matters in passing only, which was more than could
be said of von Grunebaum in his Medieval Islam. 7 The German
Handbuch der
Orientalistik also only rarely mentioned trade and commerce, but then its
format as a handbook did not allow for extended thematic discussions.
Four

An exception is W. Popper, who included some numismatic evidence in
his Egypt and
Syria under the Circassian sultans 1382 1468 AD: Systematic notes to
Von Taghri Birdi's
chronicles of Egypt, University of California Publications in Semitic
Philology 15 16
(Berkeley, 1955 7).

C. Brockelmann, History of the Islamic peoples, trans. M. Perlmann and
J. Carmichael (New
York, i960 [1939]); G. E. von Grunebaum, Medieval Islam: Study in
cultural orientation, 2nd
edn (Chicago, 1953 [1946]).

Handbuch der Orientalistik (Leiden, 1911), vol. VI, parts 1 3: B. Spuler,
Die Chalifenzeit
(Leiden, 1952), trans, and adapted by F. R. C. Bagley as The age of the
caliphs (Leiden, 1969);
B. Spuler, Die Mongolenzeit (Leiden, 1953), trans, and adapted by F. R.
C. Bagley as The
Mongol period (Leiden, 1969); and H.J. Kissling et al., Neuzeit (Leiden,
1959), trans, and
adapted by F. R. C. Bagley as The last great Muslim empires (Leiden,
1969).

The mechanisms of commerce

years after the appearance of the CHI, M. G. H. Hodgson's The venture of Islam
was published. 9 Hodgson was aware of the importance of trade, and acknowl
edged its existence in passages scattered throughout the three volumes. Yet
economic history was clearly not a major concern of this work. The only
mention of a monetary event in the first two volumes, for example, was that of
Abd al Malik's reforms, and then it was only discussed from an art historical
perspective how the design choices for the coins reflected Muslim power
with regard to Byzantium and not in the context of the economic or
administrative repercussions of this development. 10

1974 also saw the publication of the second edition of The legacy of Islam,
and this book made a step forward in terms of bringing economic history to a
wider audience." In speaking of the differences between this edition and
the 1931 original edition, C. E. Bosworth's foreword specifically mentioned
chapter 5, 'Economic developments', by M. A. Cook, as an example of the
'interaction between Islam and the outside world, above all, between Islam
and the western Christian world as mediated through the Mediterranean
basin' as one of the new contributions. 12 There had been no economic
chapter in the first edition. Cook's chapter was divided into three sections:
the first addresses the agricultural contributions of Islamic peoples to south
ern Europe; the second and longest section was on mercantile connections
between Islam and Europe; and the third contains an extended warning
(echoing Cahen in the CHI) not to accept uncritically dubious assertions of
Muslim economic backwardness or decay. The chapter as a whole was
concerned with sweeping matters: questions of agricultural and commercial
legacy, particularly vis a vis Europe. It stressed the role of rulers in the

redistribution of Mediterranean economies, rulers often indifferent to the interests of mercantile classes. 13 Yet most importantly, it had a strong subtheme of questioning assumptions, and it made two very important points that are still relevant today, whether or not one is concerned with questions of 'development' (or lack thereof) of the Islamic world. 14 The first
concerned the state of our knowledge: 'The lack of Muslim inventions may
reflect more on the state of our knowledge than it does on the inventiveness

9 M. G. H. Hodgson, The venture of Islam, 3 vols. (Chicago, 1974).

10 Ibid., vol. I, pp. 226 and 246.

11 Joseph Schacht and C. E. Bosworth, The legacy of Islam, 2nd edn (Oxford, 1974).

12 Ibid., p. v.

13 Ibid., p. 225.

14 The discussion is found in ibid, on pp. 240 1, For an example of contemporary assertions
of decay see C. Issawi, Tfte economic history of the Middle East, 1800 1914: A hook of readings
(Chicago, 1966), p. 3.

of the Muslims.' Any gap could just as easily be due to the limited nature of
both the sources and our knowledge of the sources. 'The second caveat is that one should not accept uncritically the views often advanced on other grounds [emphasis added] for supposing the economic history of the Islamic

world to have been of a particularly backward character.' It is worth restat
ing the obvious that there is no neat symmetry between cultural and
economic trajectories. 15 Thus in this chapter the reader was presented with
an overview of the then current debates and foci of interest, but not an
examination of the nuts and bolts of trade.

Three major works published in this era that did make significant contri
butions to an understanding of the economic history of the Islamic world must
be highlighted. 1 The first was a collected studies volume published in 1970
which addressed the economic history of the Middle East. 17 Part I of this
volume contained ten valuable studies by leading scholars on economic topics
from the Middle Ages, ending in 1500. Several of these studies, such as the
contribution on monetary aspects of Islamic history by Ehrenkreutz, and the
combined contribution 'From England to Egypt, 1350 1500' by Lopez,
Miskimin and Udovitch, continue to shape inquiries to this day. 1

The next work was Udovitch's Partnership and profit in medieval Islam, also
published in 1970. I9 In this important book, Udovitch carefully examined
jurisprudence (fiqh) manuals of the second/eighth and third/ninth centuries
to establish the legal frameworks devised by the ^ulamS to regulate trade and
commerce. In the absence of commercial documents from Islamic populations,
Udovitch provided a detailed exploration of the rules governing the many types
of commercial partnerships within the Hanafi, Malik! and Shafi'I schools
of law.
He also devoted attention to the commenda (muddraba in Hanafi texts, muqarada
in the other two madhhabs), an agreement wherein one partner provides the
capital and the other conducts the actual business for an agreed upon share of
the profits. This split was ordinarily two thirds profit to the capital provider, and
one third to the other partner. Udovitch was well aware of the gap between

15 A point recently reiterated by Robert Irwin in his The Alhambra (London, 2005), p. 19.

16 Noticeably missing from this discussion is the work of E. Ashtor. For reasons of space I
am unable to address his work here.

17 M. A. Cook (ed.), Studies in the economic history of the Middle East from tfte rise of Islam to the
present day (London, 1970).

18 A. Ehrenkreutz, 'Monetary aspects of medieval Near Eastern economic history', in ibid.,
pp. 37 50; R. Lopez, H. Miskimin and A. Udovitch, 'England to Egypt, 1350 1500: Long
term trends and long distance trade', in ibid., pp. 91 128. Cf S.J. Borsch, 'Thirty years
after Lopez, Miskimin, and Udovitch', Mamluk Studies Review, 8, 2 (2004).

19 A. L. Udovitch, Partnership and profit in medieval Islam (Princeton, 1970).

336

The mechanisms of commerce

these legal texts and actual practice, but argued convincingly that in the matter of
pecuniary transactions there is reason to accept that the practices described
reflected reality in many cases. 20 This would seem to be the case especially for
the legal devices known as hiyal, which were designed to bring unlawful actions
into apparent conformity with the law. 2,1

But by far the most important contribution of this era was S. D. Goitein's

seminal A Mediterranean society, vol. I, The economic foundations, published in
1967. 22 Using the documents of the Geniza, a storehouse of texts preserved by
ajewish community in old Cairo, Goitein presented a detailed description and
analysis of the commercial practices undertaken by that community.
Chapter 3 of this book, 'The world of commerce and finance', provided the
first thorough discussion of the mechanisms of commerce of the medieval
Islamic world in modern scholarship, and remains a necessary foundation
stone for any serious economic analysis of the Mediterranean region and
beyond. Drawing upon examples of wills, contracts, partnership contracts,
bills of sale etc. , this book not only provides an insight into the economic life of
the Jews of Fustat, but their relations, commercial and otherwise, with their
Muslim neighbours. Goitein's analyses were based on documents from every
day life and business, informed by his awareness of what the juridical thinkers
wrote. The Geniza also contained documents dealing with both local and
long distance trade. In addition to partnership and commenda texts relating
to trade, there survive letters of credit (suftajas), which helped trade by
minimising the necessity of transporting quantities of cash. 23 Goitein also
carefully analysed how merchants worked in an era where many different
coins circulated. The Geniza documents mentioned a wide variety of coin
ages. They show that merchants specified which coins to use or accept, and
how coins sometimes circulated in sealed purses of set values. In his analysis
Goitein took great care to illustrate how these different coinages were treated
and exchanged. His example should be followed by all. 24

20 Cf. J. A. Wakin, The function of documents in Islamic law: The chapter on sales from Tahawi's
Kitab al shurut al kablr (Albany, 1972); and R. Brunschvig, 'Conceptions monetaires
chez les juristes musulmans (VHIe XHIe siecles)', Arabica, 14 (1967).

21 See Udovitch's discussions of hiyal in Partnership and profit, pp. 11 12 and 63 4. Cf.
J. Schacht, 'Hiyal', Eh, vol III, pp. 510 13; M. Bernard, 'Mu'amalat', Eh, vol. VII,
pp. 255 7.

22 S. D. Goitein, A Mediterranean society: The Jewish communities of tfte Arab world as
portrayed in tfie documents of the Cairo Geniza, 6 vols. (Berkeley and London, 1967 93),
vol. I: Economic foundations (Berkeley, 1967).

23 Not all suftajas were for large amounts. See ibid., vol. I, pp. 242 7.

24 Cf. the glossary of S. Tsugitaka's State and rural society in medieval Islam: Sultans, muqta's
and fallahun (Leiden, 1997), where the entry for dinar (p. 244) reads 'Unit of gold coin. 1
dinar was equal to 14 dirhams of silver during the Buwayhid period, around 38 dirhams

337

The New Cambridge History of Islam

The case of Egypt

While the Geniza contained documents from across the Mediterranean world,
and from the Indian Ocean basin as well, the majority of its documents were
Egyptian in origin. In the remainder of this chapter my examples will be
drawn from Egypt. Part of this is reflective of sources. One of the major
changes in the intellectual milieu since 1970 has been the discovery and
publication of many more sources for economic history. The study of these
sources has enabled archive based historians to publish documents and liter
ary texts that have economic foci writ large. In addition, archaeologists have
discovered local archives of individuals which make it much easier to explore
economic questions. Moreover, as is discussed below, advances in numismatic
scholarship have placed monetary historians on much firmer ground for

many regions and eras of Islamic history. This is certainly seen, for example,
in the area of the Indian Ocean based studies, where research on the economic
history of the region has increased substantially. 25 This is also the case for the
Ottoman empire, which has seen an explosion of scholarship on economic
history. 2 Similarly for Yemen, where recent work has advanced knowledge
far beyond what was possible in 1970. 27

Even with these and other welcome developments, however, Egypt has
seen its share of newly available sources and retains its status as the most
source rich region for this area of inquiry. This remains the case even though
we know of events such as that which took place in 791/1389, when the state

during the Ayyubid period, and 20 dirhams in the first half of the Mamluk period.' This
definition ignores the fact that the dinars and dirhams of these dynasties differed radically
from one another.

25 Contemporary to the CHI was D. S. Richards (ed.), Islam and the trade of Asia: A
colloquium (Oxford, 1970). The scholarship since is wide ranging and plentiful: K. N.
Chaudhuri's Trade and civilization in tfte Indian Ocean: An economic history from the rise of
Islam to 1750 (Cambridge, 1985); K. N. Chaudhuri, Asia before Europe: Economy and
civilization of the Indian Ocean from the rise of Islam to iy;o (Cambridge, 1990); J. F.
Richards (ed.), The imperial monetary system of Mughal India (Oxford, 1987); and
S. Goron and J. P. Goenka, The coins of the Indian sultanates (New Delhi, 2001).

26 See H. Inalcik and D. Quataert, An economic and social history of the Ottoman empire, 2
vols. (Cambridge, 1994), vol. I: yoo 1600 and vol. II: 1600 1914. For the monetary history
of the Ottomans see Sevket Pamuk, A monetary history of the Ottoman empire (Cambridge,
2000). On numismatic topics see the five volume series on the Akce by S. Sreckovic, all

published by the author: Akces, vol. I: Orhan Gazi Murad II, 699 848 AH (Belgrade, 1999);
Akges, vol. II: Mehmed IIFatih Selim I Yavuz, 848 926 AH (Belgrade, 2000); Akces, vol. Ill:
Suleyman I Kanuni, 926 9J4 AH (Belgrade, 2003); Akces, vol. IV: Selim II San Murad III,
974 ioojj AH (Belgrade, 2005); and Akces, vol. V: Mehmed III Mustafa I, 1003 1032 AH
(Belgrade, 2007); and S. Sreckovic, Ottoman mints and coins (Belgrade, 2002).

27 D. M. Varisco, Medieval agriculture and Islamic science: The almanac of a Yemeni sultan
(Seatde, 1994). R. E. Margariti, Aden and tfte Indian Ocean trade: 150 years in the life of a
medieval Arabian port (Chapel Hill, 2007).

338

The mechanisms of commerce

archives were sold by the recently deposed Sultan Barquq on his way out of town. 2 But there are pockets of archival like documentary caches which survived. Notable among them are the papyri records from the early
Islamic centuries; 29 the primarily Circassian era Mamluk waqf documents; 30
the Haram al Sharif documents; 31 the Ottoman era court documents, utilised
decades apart by Rabie and Hanna; 32 the Quseir documents; 33 and the exca
vations of Qasr Ibrim, which revealed a cache of 122 Arabic and Turkish documents dating from the Ottoman era. 34

But there is more at work in my choice of Egyptian examples than their abundance or my familiarity with them. The key issue here is whether one
assumes that there is an Islamic commerce, or whether there are Islamic commerces. Cahen and Cook argued that one could not support assertions of

Islamic commerce as conservative and never changing. Part of accepting their
conclusions is being cognisant of changes and differing practice with regard to
time and place. Without a thorough examination of practices encountered
within the parameters of chronology and geography it cannot be assumed that
what was in effect in one place at one time was true for all places and all times.
Asserting this does not ignore the overarching 'highway of coherence' of
religious and juridical thought that linked the Islamic world. 35 Far from it.
Within that highway of coherence one must be aware of variance, for local
conditions mattered. The legal structures provided by the various Islamic
schools of law contained differences, and it is known that certain schools were

28 F. Bauden, 'The recovery of Mamluk chancery documents from an unsuspected place',
in M. Winter and A. Levanoni (eds.), The Mamluks in Egyptian and Syrian politics and
society (Leiden, 2003), p. 74.

29 See the works of G. Frantz Murphy in the bibliography to this chapter.

30 C. F. Petry, 'A Geniza for Mamluk studies? Charitable trust (waqf) documents as a
source for economic and social history', Mamluk Studies Review, 2 (1998). For a close
study of the monetary information found in a waqf document see Gilles P. Hennequin,
"Waqf et monnaie dans l'Egypte mamluke', JESHO, 38 (1995).

31 D. P. Littie, A catalogue of the Islamic documents from al Haram as Sarlf in Jerusalem (Beirut,
1984). An example of how these materials may be used for economic and social history is
Y. Rapoport's Marriage, money and divorce in medieval Islamic society (Cambridge, 2005).

32 H. Rabie, The financial system of Egypt AH 564 741/AD 1169 1341 (London, 1972);
N. Hanna, Making big money in 1600: The life and times of Isma'il Abu Taqiyya, Egyptian
merchant (Syracuse, 1998).

33 L. Guo, Commerce, culture, and community in a Red Sea port in the thirteenth century: Tfte
Arabic documents from Quseir (Leiden, 2004). Cf the review by M. A. Friedman in JAOS,
126 (2006), pp. 401 9.

34 M. Hinds and H. Sakkout, Arabic documents from the Ottoman period from Qasr Ibrim
(London, 1986); and M. Hinds and V. Menage, Qasr Ibrim in the Ottoman period: Turkish
and further Arabic documents (London, 1991).

35 The term is B. Musallim's from his 'The ordering of Muslim societies', in F. Robinson
(ed.), The Cambridge illustrated history of Islam (Cambridge, 1996), p. 164.

339

The New Cambridge History of Islam

more influential than others in certain times and places. It is also known, for
example, that local practices, some of them relating to indigenous minorities
or to pre Islamic practices, had an influence. In the case of Egypt one need
only mention the importance of the Coptic calendar, to give but one example,
on the agricultural (and therefore also the tax) calendar of Egypt, as seen in the
works of al Nabulusi or Ibn Mammati. 3 These local factors specific to Egypt
were not relevant to other areas of the Islamic world. It is incumbent upon
scholars working in those areas to establish the local conditions that shaped
the topics of their inquiry.

In short, given the state of the field of economic history of the Muslim
world, the first task to accomplish is to gain an awareness of the various

economic parameters in place within any geographical and temporal frame
work. For that reason I will focus on Egypt. Only then may comparison with
regions outside that area be conducted on a firm foundation. 37 By focusing on
Egypt, however, I am not assuming that it is representative of the wider
Islamic world, although it may be. That remains to be established.

Mechanisms of commerce

Money

At the heart of many commercial transactions is money. It is of course possible
to use many different materials as money, as well as to conduct trade by barter
and avoid money entirely. The historian al Maqrizi stated that in his childhood
he saw the people of Alexandria using bread as a means of exchange. 38 Many
of the eleventh/ seventeenth twelfth/ eighteenth century bills of sale found at
Qasr Ibrim mention tracts of land exchanged for measures of cotton. 39 For the
most part, however, money for the periods under examination here meant
coins. Thus it is imperative for scholars interested in the economic history of
any part of the Muslim world to be familiar with the coinage systems in place
at that time and place, as great variance is observed. Dinar and dirham, while
by far the most commonly encountered terms for gold and silver coins

36 Ibn al Nabulusi, Ta'nkh alfayyum wa biladih, ed. B. Moritz (Cairo, 1898); Ibn Mammatl,
Kitab qawdwln al dawdwln, ed. A. S. Atiya (Cairo, 1943). Cf. R. C. Cooper, 'Ibn
Mammati's rules for the ministries: Translation with commentary of the Qawdwln al
dawdwln', Ph.D. thesis, University of California, Berkeley (1973).

37 There is a need to develop detailed case studies first, so that the comparative may
follow. See Richard Evans, In defense of history (New York, 2000), p. 18.

38 Al Maqrizi, Igkathat al umma, ed. M. M. Ziyada and J. M. al Shayyal (Cairo, 1940), p. 69.

39 Hinds and Sakkout, Arabic documents, document nos. 3, 28, 31. Cf. no. 14, where land was
exchanged for a combination of 24 measures of cotton and 1.5 piastres.

340

The mechanisms of commerce

respectively, are not the only ones found in the source materials. It should also
be emphasised that the coins that went by those names often varied consid
erably, and the failure to take that into account can cause confusion. 40
Moreover, despite the fact that there were many legal discussions of dinars
and dirhams, modern scholars have pointed out that the market price of these
coins 'rarely corresponded with these definitions'. 41

Coins are bits of metal used as money. These coins were prepared by hand.
Using basic metallurgical techniques, workers would prepare coin flans (blank
disks of metal) for striking between two incuse carved dies which would
transfer the words and images of those dies to the two sides of the flan. 42 As
is the case with other economic topics, it is easier to study Islamic coins today
than four decades ago. This is particularly true for Egypt, where several
studies have addressed its monetary history, the most recent overview appear
ing in 1998. 43 Since then, however, two major studies addressing understudied
dynastic periods of Egyptian numismatics, the Ikhshidid and the Fatimid, have
appeared. 44 Another major development is the publication of sylloges. A
sylloge presents images and descriptions of all the coins of a certain collection,

subject to defined parameters of mint and time, and is usually organised by
mint series. Sylloges are thought by many to be the next generation in
numismatic scholarship after dynastic corpora and institutional catalogues.
They support a general movement in this scholarship from questions of
identification and attribution towards more intensive analysis of monetary
developments. In order to support this sort of research, more published
specimens of coins are needed so that scholars may assemble data sets of
sufficient size to allow for die studies, metrological studies etc. While the field
of classical numismatics is awash with sylloges presenting collections of Greek
or Roman coins found in many different cabinets, until recently the field of

40 G. C. Miles, 'Dinar', Eh, vol. II, pp. 297 9; G. C. Miles, 'Dirham', Eh,
vol. II, pp. 319 20.

41 Cahen, 'Economy, society, institutions', p. 526; M. L. Bates, 'Dirham',
Dictionary of the
Middle Ages (New York, 1984), vol. IV, p. 216.

42 See D. Sellwood, 'Medieval minting techniques', British Numismatic
Journal, 31 (1982);
C. Toll, 'Minting techniques according to Arabic literary sources', Oriental Suecana,
19 20 (1970 1); H. W. Brown, 'The medieval mint of Cairo: Some aspects of mint
organisation and administration', in N.J. Mayhew, and P. Spufford (eds.), Later medieval
mints: Organisation, administration, and technique, BAR International Series 389 (1988);
and C. Cahen, 'La frappe des monnais en Egypte au VIe/XIIIe siecle d'apres le Minhdj
d'al Makhzumi', in L. L. Orlin (ed.), Michigan Oriental studies in honor of George C. Miles
(Ann Arbor, 1976).

43 W. C. Schultz, 'The monetary history of Egypt, 642 1517', in C. F. Petry (ed.), The
Cambridge history of Egypt, vol. I: Islamic Egypt, 640 1517 (Cambridge, 1998).

44 J. L. Bacharach, Islamic history through coins: An analysis and catalogue of tenth century

Ikshidid coinage (Cairo, 2006); N. D. Nicol, A corpus of Fatimid coins (Trieste, 2006).

341

The New Cambridge History of Islam

Islamic numismatics was a relative latecomer to the publication of sylloges. To
date, three institutions have begun publishing their Islamic collections in sylloge format, and another is starting the process. 45

Along with the increased availability of numismatic information, another significant development over the past decades has been a lively debate about
the way coins circulated and were valued. Simply put, there is a spectrum of
belief, ranging from one end, which assumes the existence of a governing authority to control the monetary activity within its domains, to the other,
which, without direct evidence of such control, argues that a different mon
etary marketplace existed. Central to this debate is the question of how a coin
was valued in the marketplace. 4 A coin is money, and money is defined by its
functions, usually three: a store of value; a unit of value; and a medium of exchange. This is where terminology such as 'unit of account' comes into play. 47 A coin is valued in terms of how it measures against a scale of value
divided by regular units. Thus in the current European Community there are
one hundred 'cent' units of account per larger euro unit. But this begs the
question. If a coin is valued by a unit of value, what determines that value? For
the periods under consideration here, the answer has two components.

The first component is based upon what the coin is made of. This is called
the intrinsic value of the coin, and by this is meant the value of the metal

used in the coin. In general, coins in the pre modern Islamic era were made of
gold, silver or copper alloys. For the precious metals of gold and silver, the
more metal the more value. The second component is determining what that
coin was worth in the markeqjlace. This is called extrinsic value. Standard
monetary theory holds that extrinsic value is added to the coin by the cost of
minting and the profit paid to the issuing authority, this latter known as the
seignorage. Thus a coin would circulate above the value of its bullion content
at the combined value of its intrinsic and extrinsic values. In order for this to

45 The three institutions that have published sylloges to date are Forschungstelle fur
Islamische Numismatik, Tubingen, with its Sylloge Numorum Arabicorum Tubingen
(6 vols, to date); the Ashmolean Museum with its Sylloge of Islamic Coins in the
Ashmolean Museum (4 vols, to date); and the Orientalischen Munzkabinett in Jena
(1 vol. to date). Full citations in the bibliography. The Israel Museum is currently
preparing the first sylloge of its Islamic coin collection, devoted to the Mamluk
Egyptian coinage.

46 For an overview of this debate see Schultz, 'The monetary history of Egypt', pp. 318 24.
The works of Gilles P. Hennequin are crucial to this question.

47 For a description of the function of monies of account see Peter Spufford, 'Appendix:
Coinage and currency', in the Cambridge economic history of Europe, vol. Ill: M. M. Postan,
E. F. Rich and Edward Miller (eds.), Economic organization and policies in the Middle Ages,
(Cambridge, 1963).

342

The mechanisms of commerce

work, however, the issuing authority must have influence over the monetary
marketplace, perhaps by insisting that only its coins be used, accepting only its
coins as payment for legal obligations or requiring all foreign coins to be taken
to the mint for melting and reissue. This assumes, therefore, that the issuing
authority controls the monetary marketplace. If it does, then surely its coins
would circulate above their intrinsic value.

The alternative view does not question the validity of these basic monetary
principalities, only their applicability. When the available numismatic evi
dence and the documentary evidence indicates that coins of multiple types,
metals, ages and weights were in circulation, as was the case in the Geniza and
the following example, then it is doubtful that the issuing authority could
regulate the coinages in use in its territory. The only opportunity to recoup
the cost of minting, for example, would be when bullion or old coin was taken
to the mint. In this situation it is imperative that scholars know and specify
which coins were being used and what they were worth in terms of the other
available coins. The sources often do. The documents excavated from Qasr
Ibrlm in upper Egypt dating from 1030/1620 1173/1759, for example, mention
no less than five different gold coin types, and three different for silver in use,
and that is only from the Arabic documents. 48 The seventh/thirteenth century
Quseir documents not only provide additional examples of multiple coins in
use, but also illustrate that the personal preferences of merchants and traders

could affect which coins were desired for use. Thus we read that one merchant
preferred Egyptian dinars to Meccan. Another document beseeched an agent
to accept payment only in silver. 49 This last document also mentions that two
different types of dirhams with different values were in circulation:

Do not pay me in golden [dinars]: change them to silver dirhams. The exchange rate in Qina and Qus is 37 [dirhams per dinar] and [if it is] the Yiisufi (?or tawfkf?) [dirham] then it is 19 and a quarter dirhams [per dinar]. O God, O God! Send me the cash in [silver] dirhams [only]. 50

As an aside, Guo was uncertain whether the un pointed adjective specifying
the second (and evidently higher quality silver) dirham was yiisufi or tawfiqi
and left it to specialists to consider. As the common names for coins were

48 Hinds and Sakkout, Arabic documents, pp. 103 6, documents 45, dated 1718, and 57, dated
1742. These two documents of sale specify that the qurilsh (piastres) cited were worth 30
nisffiddas. Each of these was a distinct type of silver coin. In this case, texts indicate that
this exchange rate was evidently stable for more than two decades. See also Hinds and
Menage, Qasr Ibrim, pp. 107 11.

49 Guo, Commerce, culture, and community, document no. 1, pp. 135 8, and no. 13, pp. 163 8.

50 Ibid., document no. 13 and the discussion on p. 57.

343

frequently derived from some element of the issuing ruler's name, the better

choice here would be yusufi, after Saladin's personal name (ism). This would
fit what is known about Egyptian silver coins in that as an alternative to the
common bad quality 'black' silver coins then in circulation, Saladin issued
better quality silver coins in the late sixth/twelfth century. 51

In the face of these variables, other assertions should be re examined. One
has to do with coin hoards, those accumulations of coins often found in situ
during an archaeological dig, or surfacing in the market as an integral whole.
Classical numismatic terminology establishes a continuum of hoard finds, with
one end held down by 'currency' hoards and the other by 'savings' hoards. 'A
currency hoard is a sum of money put together by drawing all its coins from
circulation on a single occasion, whereas a saving hoard is formed by gradually
adding coins to a hoard over a period of several years; the difference in the way
the coins were collected will affect the internal composition of the hoard.' 52 To
this distinction some scholars add the category of jewellers" hoards, meaning in
this case collections of coins, usually segregated by metal, which were awaiting
melting by the jeweller in question. These distinctions are useful, but must be
treated carefully. If, for example, coins were not governed by a tightly con
trolled system of currency, it would be wrong to assume at first glance that a
hoard with coins dating from a span of many years is automatically a savings
hoard. Such a label draws away from the distinct possibility that older coins
were still in circulation long after their minting. I am not saying that this is
always the case. Rather, it should always be investigated for the particular time
and place under consideration. If there is evidence that coins were tightly
regulated in the markeqjlace then these classical labels may be used with
confidence. Without that evidence, however, it is not so simple.

A second area in which initial assumptions must be revisited has to do with
coinages made from copper and copper alloys. Due to the low intrinsic value
of copper, at least compared to silver and gold, it is usually assumed that such
coins are fiat money. That is to say, that their value is controlled by the state at
an amount higher than their intrinsic metallic content, usually by means of
controlling the number in circulation. A corollary of this is that such coins are
usually assumed to be of local currency only. How, after all, could an issuing
authority guarantee value outside the area it controlled? But what if archaeo
logical finds indicate that copper coins from Egypt circulated far from the cities

51 See P. Balog, The coinage of the Ayyubids (London, 1980), pp. 29 and 36 7.

52 A. Burnett, Coins (London, 1991), p. 51. Cf. J. Casey, Understanding ancient coins: An
introduction for archaeologists and historians (London, 1986), esp. chap. 5; and P. Grierson,
Numismatics (Oxford, 1975), pp. 130 6.

344

The mechanisms of commerce

of their minting? In the case of the Mamluk provinces of Jerusalem and Kerak,
where there were no mints, Mamluk copper coins from Cairo and Damascus
show up in large numbers in archaeological digs. Clearly they were in use, and
people valued them. How does the assumption of 'fiat' valued money hold up

in that case? These are questions that need attention. Moreover, if coins were
not subject to defined periods of use (the meaning of the term currency), but
continued in circulation as long as they had value, this may explain why the
Mamluk ninth/fifteenth century chronicles consistently refer to copper in
circulation while we have little evidence to suggest that it was minted in
large quantities after the 790s /1390s. 53

A third repercussion of an environment of this type is that coins were
subject to supply and demand pressures not just of coins but of bullion.
Perhaps the most famous example of this from Mamluk times was the
pilgrimage of the Malian ruler Mansa Musa in 724 /i324f. His entourage
spent so much gold dust and bullion in the markets of Cairo that the value
of gold dropped in relation to silver. This change was only temporary,
however, as normal exchange rates soon reappeared. 54

An example of money of account: the dinar jayshi

Perhaps the most well known example of a money of account is the dinar
jayshi (lit. 'army dinar'). It was never an actual coin. As such, it is worth
emphasising that while it was not tangible it was still real. It was used in Egypt
to measure the value of the annual revenues of income producing agricultural
units (villages etc.), especially for the purpose of assigning income via tqta's to
military officers and men. These units produced agricultural goods, and those
goods were the basis of the benefit paid to those holding the tqta's. The dinar
jayshi was thus apparently a unit of account designed to straddle the difference
between revenue in kind (ghalla) and in cash (jayn). It was said to have been
established by the eunuch Qaraqush and implemented during the cadastral
land survey (rawk) ordered by Saladin in 565/1169. It is usually said to have
been equivalent in value to one ardabb a measure of volume associated with
grain of wheat and barley. That amount of grain was itself equivalent to

53 See J. L. Bacharach, 'Circassian monetary policy: Copper', JESHO, 19
(1976); and B. Shoshan,

'From silver to copper: Monetary changes in fifteenth century Egypt', SI,
56 (1982).

54 W. C. Schultz, 'Mansa Musa's gold in Mamluk Cairo: A reappraisal of
a world civiliza
tions anecdote', in J. Pfeiffer, S. Quinn and E. Tucker (eds.), Post Mongol
Central Asia and
the Middle East: Studies in history and historiography in honor of
Professor John E. Woods
(Wiesbaden, 2006).

345

one quarter of a gold dinar. While that basic narrative is well known, the
dinar
jayshi has caused many a scholar to scratch his head in confusion. 55
Two recent
studies by Sato and Borsch, however, have revisited this unit of account
in
attempts to better understand it and trace its changing value over time.
Sato
argued that the dinar jayshi existed at different values at the same time,
and
that soldiers of lower ranks were assigned revenue payments at lower
rates
than higher ranking amirs. 5 Borsch rejected this conclusion, arguing
that
determinations of revenue made by the careful rawk of 715/1315 were
made
in the dinar jayshi prior to distribution of revenue allotments (Hbras) to
individuals, and thus were consistent in their initial value. Any change in
value in distribution was done after the Hbras were set. 57 In Borsch's
words:

Thus, we know that the dinar jayshi was not a fictitious accounting
device,
nor was it always used as a malleable measure of value by the
bureaucracy.

The picture that emerges is one of a money of account that was subject to
dual usage. As a measure of land value, it was employed as a unit of the
ardabb. As a means of payment, it was manipulated by the bureaucracy for
salary allocations. The first type of usage, for surveys, strove for accuracy and
simplicity; the second for bureaucratic machination and control of payment
flows. Viewed from this perspective, [the] superficially confusing role of the
dinar jayshi becomes logically clear. 58

Borsch also demonstrated how the dinar jayshi was used and valued up to
the disruptions caused by the Black Death. At that point the revenue levels
established by the 715/1315 cadastral survey were rendered useless by peasant
deaths and abandoned lands, and the value of the dinar jayshi, set as it was
by that survey, was no longer reliable.

Nevertheless the dinar jayshi remains not yet fully understood. As R. S.
Cooper pointed out, the earliest known value of the dinar jayshi cited in Ibn
Mammati (d. 607/1209), that of one ardabb of wheat and barley, and equiv
alent to one quarter of a dinar, is in fact not reliable on textual grounds. 59

55 See the comments by L. A. Mayer, 'Some problems of Mamluk coinage', in Transactions
of the International Numismatic Congress (London, 1938); and H. A. R. Gibb, 'The armies of
Saladin', in his Studies on the civilization of Islam (Boston, 1962), p. 76.

56 T. Sato, State and rural society in Medieval Islam: Sultans, muqta'as and fallahun (Leiden,
1997), PP- 153 6.

57 S.J. Borsch, The Black Death in Egypt and England: A comparative study (Austin, 2005),
pp. 68 71.

58 Ibid., p. 70.

59 R. C. Cooper, A note on the dinar jayshi', JESHO, 16 (1973), pp. 317 18. Similar

discussions are found in Cooper's review of H. Rabie's The financial system of Egypt,
found mjournal of Semitic Studies (1973), p. 186, and in his thesis, 'Ibn Mammati's rules for
the ministries', pp. 364 8.

The mechanisms of commerce

Moreover, that same passage of Ibn Mammati indicates that the dinar jayshi' s
value in specie (as opposed to the set measure of wheat and barley) could and
did change. Ibn Mammati mentioned values of one quarter, one third and
even as much as two thirds of a gold dinar for one dinar jayshi. Thus within a
few decades of its initial use the dinar jayshi was being exchanged at different
values. We are thus left with the distinct possibility that this unit of account
was subject to the same pressures affecting value as those units of account
based on actual coins, that is to say issues of supply, demand and the values of
both the agricultural goods themselves and the coins in use at the time. As
Borsch pointed out, there is every reason to think that agricultural revenue
was carefully studied over the course of the 715/1315 survey, and that Hbras
were set in terms of a consistently valued dinar jayshi. But as the time from
that rawk increased, and as facts on the ground inevitably changed, it is also
intriguing to consider the possible existence of an alternative marketplace
where Hbra the right to agricultural revenue as stated in terms of the dinar
jayshi, which was based upon goods may have been exchanged for ready

cash at various rates of exchange. One can well imagine that the reluctance of
an individual to take value in crops may have led to the acceptance of a lesser
value in specie.

As an aside, this possible post bureaucratic use of the dinar jayshi may help us
understand one of the ways by which agricultural wealth was transformed into
monetary wealth. As is well known, the role of agriculture across the central
regions of the eastern hemisphere, but especially in regions such as Egypt and
India, always produced more wealth, in total, than trade or other mercantile
activities. ° But agricultural produce in kind does not turn into cash by itself.
Someone has to buy it, with money from somewhere. Despite the significant
recent work done on the rural economy of Egypt we still do not fully under
stand how grain was turned into coin. * The possibility that rights to agricultural
produce, which is what receiving payment in the form of dinars jayshi implies,
were sold for cash in a secondary market may be one such avenue of trans
formation. But this is speculation, and must await further study.

Finally, some confusion exists about units of value smaller than the existing
dirhams and mithqals. One such unit of account was the qirat. 2 While a qirat
was also a unit of weight (see below), from the context of Ibn Mammati and
al Nabulusi it clearly meant the fraction i/24th, and was used for measuring

60 See Hodgson, Venture of Islam, vol. I, pp. 124S.

61 See the works of Sato and Frantz Murphy in the bibliography to this chapter.

62 E. von Zambaur, 'Kirat', EI, vol. IV, pp. 1023 4.

The New Cambridge History of Islam

smaller units of both land and money. 63 There is no numismatic evidence,
however, that there was ever a specific coin minted in Egypt to the value of
a qirat. Thus when one encounters a document such as Quseir no. 31, where
a quantity of wheat was cited as being worth 'two dinars minus two qirats',
these two qirats , equivalent to one twelfth the value of a dinar, are clearly an
accounting value. 64 Presumably the seller of this amount, if having received
two dinars' worth of gold from the buyer, would have needed to return this
one twelfth of a dinar's worth of gold in fragments of broken gold or the
equivalent value in some other means of exchange.

Weights and measures

As is clear from the above, weight mattered, especially for coins. 65 Regardless of
whether the situation studied was one of consistendy struck coins or not,
weighing was a necessary means to determine value. It could even be used
instead of counting, especially when large amounts were involved, as was the
case of the ransom of King Louis IX paid to the Ayyubids when the monarch was
captured during his assault on Egypt in 646 7/1248 9. When multiple coins of
varying weights were in circulation, however, weighing is a necessity rather than
a convenience, as such coins could not pass by tale (count), but only by weight.
The act of weighing requires three necessary components. The first is an
apparatus to do the weighing. The second is a set of weights, meaning, in this

sense, a set of objects of known weight used as a standard against which others
are compared. The third component is a system of units of defined value which orders and is reflected by the actual weights. Taken together, the study
of these phenomena fall under the subject heading of metrology. Similar to
the situation of coins, the metrology of the Islamic world before 1800 is a complex topic. 67 Systems and units of measurement varied tremendously

63 In the Qasr Ibrim documents it is frequently encountered in the meaning of 1 / 24th of a
parcel of land.

64 Guo, Commerce, culture, and community, pp. 212 18.

65 For reasons of space I restrict my comments here to the smaller weight units associated
with coinage. The subject of units of measurement for commercial goods is a wider
topic, and the same comments about the need for an awareness of the various systems
in place hold true. For an introduction to these larger units see E. Ashtor, 'Makayil and
Mawazln', EI2, vol. VI, pp. 117 21.

66 See Jean de Joinville, 'The life of St Louis', in M. R. B. Shaw, Chronicles of the Crusades
(London, 1963), p. 258.

67 Ashtor, 'Makayil and Mawazln; E. Ashtor, 'Levantine weights and standard parcels: A
contribution to the metrology of the later Middle Ages', BSOAS, 45 (1982); W. Hinz,
Islamische Masse und Gewichte (Leiden, 1955); J. Walker and D. R. Hill, 'Sanadjat', Eh, vol.
X, p. 3.

348

The mechanisms of commerce

across time and region, and source material has survived in differing amounts
from those periods and places. While it once was possible to assert the existence of 'unalterable quantities' in Islamic metrology, that is no longer the
case. 69 One assumes consistency at one's peril.

In terms of the first component, the apparatus for weighing, the Islamic world had access to both double pan scales (triizan) and to steelyards (qarastun). 7 " The knowledge existed to make these with great accuracy. Al Khazim (fl. sixth/twelfth century) wrote of a scale approaching 1/60,000
in precision. 71 Techniques to measure specific gravity were known, which
enabled the purity of gold and silver alloys to be determined. Fraudulent methods of manipulating scales were also known and described. Most of what we know about these instruments and their use is from analytical treatises such as al Khazim's, however. Very few artifactual remnants of scales have survived. 72 Thus it is especially useful when documents such as
Quseir nos. 2 and 16 are found, for the first mentions the difference observed between two scales, and the second contains a warning not to trust a particular scale. Together they corroborate aspects of what is known
from the normative sources. 73

Such instruments, however, could only establish the weight of one object (or
substance) in relation to another object. They relied upon balance to establish
equivalencies between the object (or substance) being weighed and an object of
known weight. Thus, in order to know the weights of coins it is necessary to
know the second component of weighing in place at the time, the weights that
were used. While theoretical treatises exist, we are lucky that surviving weights

68 Many scholars have discussed these differences. Ashtor ('Makayil and Mawazin') noted
the differences between the metrological systems found in the Arabic and Persian

speaking spheres of the early Islamic world. J. Kolbas has argued that there were four
different mithqdl standards influencing the Mongol coinage minted in the Islamic world.
See her 'Mongol money: The role of Tabriz from Chingiz Khan to Uljaytu: 616 to 709
H/1220 to 1309 AD', Ph.D. thesis, New York University (1992), pp. 8 10.

69 Von Zambaur, 'Krrat'. Note as well the cautionary words of G. C. Miles ('Dirham')
about earlier efforts to define traditional units in modern metric grams. These efforts
have 'resulted in various figures, most of them probably erroneous'.

70 E. Wiedemann, 'al Mrzan', Eh, vol. VII, pp. 195 204. For the steelyard see K. Jaouiche,
'al Karastun', Eh, vol. IV, p. 629.

71 J. Vernet, 'al Khazini', Eh, vol. IV, p. 1186.

72 L Holland, author of Weights and weight like objects from Caesarea Maritima (Hadera,
2009), estimates the survival rate of scale parts as compared to weight objects as less
than one per several hundred. Personal communication with the author.

73 See Guo, Commerce, culture, and community, documents 2, 16. For a documentary
reference to a scale, see the Mamluk inheritance deed that lists a scale accompanied
by four Roman bronze coins (possibly used as weights?), see K.J. al 'Asali, Wathd'iq
maqdasiyya ta'nkhiyya, 2 vols. (Beirut, 1985), vol. II, no. 635.

349

The New Cambridge History of Islam

are well attested for Egypt for most Islamic periods. 74 The overwhelming

majority of these objects were made of glass. 75 They exist in great quantities
from the early Islamic period of Umayyad and Abbasid rule, and again from the
Fatimid period, with good representation as well from the Ayyubid and Mamluk eras. While it has been argued by some that these glass objects served
as money, it is highly unlikely that they did so in any official capacity. 76 These
objects are extremely valuable to us as source material for the actual weight
values of Egyptian ponderal units. 77 Since most of the surviving examples do not
have legends which tell us the weight unit for which they were used, it is necessary to study them alongside what is known about the final component of
weighing, an agreed upon system of weight values.

In Islamic Egypt the terminology of weight units often overlapped with the
terminology for coins and units of account, resulting in much confusion. In a
nutshell, the dirham was a basic unit of weight, although how much a dirham
weighed could vary according to what was weighed. The evidence suggests,
for example, that the dirham unit for weighing small amounts of substances
such as plant extracts etc. was slightly heavier than the dirham unit applied to
silver coins/ 8 For the Mamluk period, for example, I have argued that the
dirham weight unit for silver coins was slightly less than 3 grams. Heavier than
the dirham was the mithqal, a unit of slightly more than 4 grams often used to
weigh gold as well as other precious commodities such as gems. Multiple units
of the dirham existed, such as the uqiyya of 12 dirhams, and the rati of 144
dirhams. 79 The overwhelming majority of surviving glass weights, however,

74 See P. Balog, Umayyad, 'Abbasid, and Tulunid glass weights and vessel stamps (New York,
1976); G. C. Miles, 'On the varieties and accuracy of eighth century Arab coin weights',

Eretz Israel, 7 (1963). It is also possible to derive metrological information from European
sources. See, for example, J C. Hocquet, 'Methodologie de l'histoire des poids et mesures
le commerce maritime entre Alexandrie et Venise durant le Haut Moyen Age', in Mercati
e mercanti nell'alto medioevo: L'area euroasiatica e Varea mediterranea (Spoleto, 1993).

75 There are some Egyptian metallic weights, however. See P. Balog, 'Islamic bronze
weights from Egypt', JESHO, 13 (1970), esp. pp. 237 41. In nearby Syria, however, the
surviving weights are almost always metallic: see L. Holland, 'Islamic bronze weights
from Caesarea Maritima', American Numismatic Society Museum Notes, 31 (1986).

76 For an overview of these controversies see Walker and Hill, 'Sanadjat'; and the
discussion in Schultz, 'The monetary history of Egypt', p. 330.

77 Bates has pointed out that glass weights 'are a better indication of the weight standards
for gold and silver and copper coins than anything we can obtain from the coins
themselves'. See his 'Coins and money in the Arabic papyri', in Y. Ragheb (ed.),
Documents de Vlslam medieval: Nouvelles perspectives de recherche (Cairo, 1991), p. 55.

78 See W. C. Schultz, 'Mamluk metrology and the numismatic evidence', al Masaq 15, 1 (2003).

79 In Syria, however, the uqiyya was apparently made up of 50 dirhams, according to al
Maqrizi. See Adel Allouche, Mamluk economics: A study and translation of alMaqrlzl's
Ighathah (Salt Lake City, 1994), p. 90.

The mechanisms of commerce

are lighter in weight than these larger multiples. When the weights of these
specimens are plotted on a frequency table, which graphs these individual
objects on a vertical axis of number and a horizontal axis of weight, the
resulting graphs suggest what the desired weight values were for these
units. ° For the Fatimid, Ayyubid and Mamluk glass weights, for example,
such graphs produce clear clusters around 1.50, 3.00 and 6.00 grams, strongly
suggesting their use as half dirham, dirham and double dirham weights. For the
Mamluk period clusters also exist at slightly less than 4.25 and 8.50 grams,
indicating possible use as mithqal and double mithqal weights. These clusters
are much smaller, however, which poses some problems. If they are indeed
mithqal weights, why do so few survive? This is especially problematic since
for the first 167 years of Mamluk rule in Egypt gold coinage was struck with a
wide variance in weight.

Moving back in time, frequency table analysis has suggested another pos
sible mystery. In 2007 a digital catalogue was published of the glass weights
and other glass objects of the Gayer Anderson Museum in Cairo. 2 When the
more than 700 Fatimid glass weights were plotted, two clusters appeared
outside the expected and found clusters around the dirham values. These were
a small cluster of eleven objects around 1.90 grams, and a larger cluster of
twenty seven around 3.80 grams. While these clusters are smaller than those
found around the dirham associated values (fifty four fall in the 2.90 2.99 gram
interval, for example), they are more than another non dirham affiliated
cluster. In addition, the majority of these specimens bear the name of
al Hakim. When the non al Hakim specimens were plotted, only five objects
fell into those clusters. The significance of this development is unknown, but
suggests that further investigation is needed.

Finally, two comments are needed. First, it must be stated that there were
smaller weight units in use, although we do not have surviving specimens of
these smaller units except in multiples. Such is the case of the qxrat used for
weight. We have multiple qxrat weights which survive from the early Islamic

80 G. F. Hill, 'The frequency table', Numismatic Chronicle, 5, 4 (1924). Frequency tables are
not without their limitations or their abuses. Nevertheless, they are quite useful for
revealing basic metrological tendencies and developments.

81 See W. C. Schultz, 'Medieval coins and monies of account: The case of large flan
Mamluk dinars', al 'Usur al Wustd: The Bulletin of the Middle East Medievalists, 12, 2
(October 2000).

82 J. L. Bacharach, R. al Nabarawy, S. Anwar and A. Yousef, A complete catalog (sylloge) of the
glass weights, vessel stamps, and ring weights in the Gayer Anderson Museum, Cairo (Mathaf
Bayt al Kritiiyya), available at
http://www.numismatics.org/dpubs/islamic/ga/. The
findings presented here are discussed in my forthcoming review of this digital sylloge.

351

period in Egypt. 83 Second, while we have no surviving accounts of how these
weights were made, we do have some information on how they were
regulated. Manuals written for market inspectors often have a section describ

ing how the market inspector (muhtasib) should examine and certify weights in
use by merchants. These mention, for example, checking for nicks or abra
sions on weights and looking suspiciously upon merchants who have multiple
sets of weights without good cause, thus showing an awareness of the possibility of fraud. 84

Legal and commercial instruments

At the time Udovitch's Partnership and profit appeared there were no known
examples of commenda or proprietary partnerships from Islamic sources in
Egypt. The only known examples of such documents were from the Geniza. 85
It was thus impossible in 1970 to ask whether the legal strictures described
in the third/ninth century, for example, continued to be used beyond the
seventh/thirteenth century, which was when the Geniza documents of
economic import became less numerous. A recent work, however, makes it
possible to begin to address this question. In her 1998 book Making big money in
1600 Nelly Hanna analysed the life and career of an Egyptian merchant named
Isma'il Abu Taqiyya from around 990/1580 to 1034/1625. An extremely
wealthy and successful merchant, this individual left no record in the
chronicles or biographical dictionaries of his age, yet left a considerable trail
of legal documents preserved in the court records of Ottoman era Cairo. He
apparently never left Egypt, yet ran a commercial practice which stretched
from West Africa to the north east Mediterranean and to the Red and Arabian
Seas. To run his network of commercial interests, as Hanna points out, he
used legal structures far older than himself. In particular, he showed an affinity
for the l aqd shirka (partnership contract), a direct legal descendant of the
sharikat al L aqd described in the earlier manuals analysed by Udovitch. Abu

83 See Balog, Umayyad, 'Abbasid and Tulunid glass weights, pp. 25 7.

84 See R. P. Buckley, 'The book of the Islamic market inspector', Journal of Semitic Studies
Supplement, 9 (1999), pp. 44 5; Ibn al Ukhuwwa, The Ma'dlim al qurbafi ahkam al hisba,
ed. Reuben Levy (London, 1938), pp. 83 6 of the Arabic edition, pp. 26 9 of the
summary translation.

85 Udovitch, Partnership and profit, pp. 8 9, citing A. Grohman, Einfuhrung und
Chrestomathie zur Arabischen Papyruskunde, 2 vols. (Prague, 1954), vol. I. For the examples
of the Geniza documents see Goitein, A Mediterranean society, vol. I, pp. 87 92 and
appendix C.

86 Hanna, Making big money in 1600. See esp. chap. 3, 'The structures of trade', pp. 43 69.
For an overview of eighth century Cairene merchants see A. Raymond, Artisans et
comtnercants au Caire au XVIIIe siecle (Damascus, 1973).

352

The mechanisms of commerce

Taqiyya did not, however, make much use of the commenda. (When he did,
the term used was mudaraba, suggesting a Hanafi influence.) While Hanna did
not provide texts of these documents or a detailed analysis of them, she
identified them, thus providing clear signposting for further study. Such a
study could provide insight into how the legal strictures of the fiqh materials
translated into actual documentation. Moreover, Abu Taqiyya showed a
willingness to use the different schools of law in his partnership contracts,
and it would be a useful exercise indeed to check which transactions were
registered with which judge to see what patterns, if any, emerge.

More evidence about the use of various commercial partnerships has also recently emerged from the Geniza. At the time of his death Goitein left unfinished what he called his 'India book', a collection of Geniza documents
having to do with the India trade. This book was recently brought to publication by M. A. Friedman as India traders of the Middle Ages: Documents
from the Cairo Geniza. This collection contains one poorly preserved com menda document (I, 30), and some of the letters included mention commen
das and other partnerships and provide evidence of their actual use. 87

Conclusion

This chapter has surveyed developments in the study of the mechanisms of
commerce in the Muslim world before 1800. While there is no doubt that our
knowledge of some aspects of these topics has expanded considerably since
the publication of the CHI it is also true that even for Egypt, about which we
probably know more than any other region of the Islamic world pre 1800, there is still much to be done. Documents discovered need to be edited. Edited documents need to be examined in the light of the theoretical issues
raised here and studied for what they reveal about economic issues. Most importantly, scholars need to be trained to do this type of research and supported when they do so. The current situation for researchers interested
in matters economic is similar to that encountered by the nautical archaeol
ogist George Bass, who faced difficulties finding experts to consult on what he
was bringing up from the fifth/ eleventh century 'glass wreck' of the south
west Anatolian coast. As Bass wrote in the introduction of the first volume
devoted to these archaeological findings:

87 S. D. Goitien and M. A. Friedman, India traders of the Middle Ages: Documents from the
Cairo Geniza (Leiden, 2008), documents I, 22; I, 30; III, 4 6.

The New Cambridge History of Islam

To put our ship into an accurate historical context, to avoid misinterpretation
of its artefacts and food remains, and to find more contemporary literary
references to daily life in Medieval Islam, I purposely gave a series of lectures
on the shipwreck at a university with one of the world's great departments of
medieval Islamic Studies. I wrote in advance to ask if I might meet with some
of the faculty or students who could help us avoid publishing utter non
sense . . . The chairman of the department answered 'I have to confess we are
all rank laymen in the field, staff and students alike, and really quite unable,
unfortunately, to hold an intelligent discussion on the subject ... If there is
anything we can do to help we shall of course be glad to do so, but our field
lies mainly in language, literature, religion and history, and I do not know if
this would be of any use to you.' No one from the department attended my
lectures. Be tolerant, then, of mistakes made by those of us who wrote parts
of this volume and the volumes that follow, but who were not formally
trained in medieval Islamic literature, religion, and history.

The only way we will learn more about the mechanisms of commerce
throughout the wide Islamic world is by making use not only of the contri
butions of the traditional fields of language, literature, religion and history, but
by moving beyond the normative emphasis often found (in the first three in
particular) to develop the skills necessary to utilise the material artefacts and
texts of daily life.

G. F. Bass, S. Matthews, J. R. Steffy and F. H. van Doorninck, Jr (eds.), Serce Limam: An
eleventh century shipwreck, vol. I: The ship and its anchorage, crew, and passengers, Ed
Rachal Foundation Nautical Archaeology Series (College Station, TX, 2004).

12

Women, gender and sexuality

MANUELA MARIN

Women and gender

The history of women in Islamic societies has made steady progress over the
last few decades, following the spectacular growth of the field in other
historiographical arenas. Particularly, although not exclusively, Ottomanists
have contributed to the increase in publications on women's history, thanks to
the richness of Ottoman archives. For other periods of Islamic history the lack
of archival evidence has not hindered the completion of some good studies
based upon other sources: literary works, chronicles, biographical dictionaries
or juridical writings. 1 To some extent these different sources are complemen
tary. While archival documents illuminate the lives of ordinary individuals
making an appearance in court, other texts inform us about societal attitudes,
normative rulings and transgressions. Biographical accounts, although nor

mally restricted to specific social groups, such as urban elites or sovereign
families, have the added value of charting women's lives across a longer
period of time, which is usually impossible from research into archival docu
ments. In a challenge to the traditional view of women in classical Islam as
unknown, hidden and passive members of society, research based upon all
these sources increasingly demonstrates the crucial role played by gender and
gendered attitudes and norms.

Women, however, were not an absolute category, permeating all social
levels although Muslim authors gladly accepted this assumption. Against the
mere fact of being a woman (undoubtedly a second class member of the
community, presided over by Muslim free males), historical research has to
consider many other factors. Differences among women, according to their
social or economic situation, their ethnic origins, their personal status free or

i See the essays collected in M. Marin and R. Deguilhem (eds.), Writing the feminine:
Women in Arab sources (London, 2002).

355

slaves, single or married and their residential lifestyles urban, peasant or
nomadic have to be taken into account before making sweeping general
isations. Muslim women were not only defined by their religious affiliation,
although this fact deeply influenced their lives. For the majority of women
living in Muslim societies religion was just a factor to be considered in
conjunction with many others, and social rank was predominant among

them. As an example, Muslim women who were members of elite households
were expected to follow seclusion rules that did not apply to their lower class
counterparts. Second, personal status affected women's lives in ways similar
to men's but in a strikingly different manner. For a woman, being a slave, for
example, meant that her owner had the legal right of using her sexually and
of giving her the added status of umm al walad, that is, 'the mother of the
child', when she became the mother of her master's acknowledged child, one
among all the other legitimate inheritors of their father. Women, in urban or
rural locations, populated a complex map of social and economic relation
ships, amalgamated kinship ties, and were used as markers of political and
moral boundaries.

Women's visibility in public spaces was subjected to strict social regula
tions. Moralists such as Ibn 'Abdun in sixth/twelfth century Seville or Ibn
al Hajj in eighth/fourteenth century Cairo strongly disapproved of the
appearance of women in markets, cemeteries, streets and other public
spaces. 2
Women of elite families were kept out of the sight of unrelated males, and
when necessity called them from their homes they had to be veiled. Family
honour and prestige were at stake if free Muslim women could be seen and
spoken about by men who were not their relatives, and women's seclusion
became a mark of status for elite households. 3 When Ibn Baq (d. 763/1362)
wrote his manual on the economic obligations of husbands towards their
wives, he observed that cork shoes (the kind of shoes used for walking in the
streets) were not needed by high class women, who scarcely used them. 4
Gender segregation was the crucial mark of the upper echelons of society, and

See H. Lutfi, 'Manners and customs of fourteenth century Cairene women: Female

anarchy versus male shaft order in Muslim prescriptive treatises', in N. R. Keddie and

B. Baron (eds.), Women in Middle Eastern history: Shifting boundaries in sex and gender

(New Haven, 1991); and V. Aguilar and M. Marin, 'Las mujeres en el espacio urbano de

alAndalus', in Julio Navarro Palazon (ed.), Casas y palacios de alAndalus (Barcelona,

1995)-

See F. Rosenthal, 'Male and female: Described and compared', in J. W. Wright and

Everett K. Rowson (eds.), Homoeroticism in classical Arabic literature (New York, 1997); and

L. Peirce, Morality tales: Law and gender in tfte Ottoman court ofAintab (Berkeley and Los

Angeles, 2003), p. 156.

M. Marin, Mujeres en al Andalus (Madrid, 2000), p. 202.

356

Women, gender and sexuality

transgression of this rule would imply a loss of honour for the male members
of the family. By virtue of their seclusion, elite women guaranteed the
purity of their family's honour; not even their names could be known by
strangers. An efficient way of shaming men was to name their womenfolk in
satirical poems, as attested by a well known anecdote in which the poet Ibn
Shuhayd (d. 399/1008) frightened a lady, who was going with her retinue to

the Cordoba main mosque, by his presence at the gate; she left immediately,
being afraid that Ibn Shuhayd would name her in a poem and dishonour her
family. The poem Ibn Shuhayd wrote about the encounter is preserved, and
nothing in it has the least hint of impropriety for the modern reader, but its
hidden meaning visual contact with a forbidden woman was clearly
understood as a menacing weapon by the parties involved. 5

Restrictions on elite women's presence in public spaces did not mean that
they were totally cut off from social relationships. On the contrary, a complex
web of personal contacts was established around them. Slaves, eunuchs,
servants and women of other social status made sure that wealthy and power
ful secluded women kept in touch with the world outside their homes, and
influenced events in the political and social arenas. However, beyond the
scope of urban, high class households, the public presence of women is
attested to by the very censorship condemning it, as in other historical
testimonials. Prohibitions for women to be out in the streets are significant,
as they show how common this behaviour was in places such as Cairo or
Damascus. In 653/1264 al Mu c izz Aybak forbade women to go out from their
homes, and in Ramadan of 690/1291 the governor of Damascus, Sanjar
al Shuja'i, forbade men and women to circulate at night in the city. In the
month of Rajab of 825/1422 the governor of Cairo, Sadr al Din Ahmad ibn al
Ajami, forbade women to stay in shops waiting for the ceremonial exit of the
pilgrimage to Mecca, something that they had previously used to do, spending
the night in the market stalls. 7

Mosques, public baths, markets and cemeteries were places frequented by
women, but their visits to public spaces, in particular baths and mosques, were
limited to ensure that they did not come in contact with men. Visiting the tombs
of relatives, or of saints and pious men in the great cemetery of al Qarafa, was a
favourite outing for Cairene women, who also participated in religious festivals,

5 J. T. Monroe, 'The striptease that was blamed on Abu Bakr's naughty son: Was Father
being shamed, or was the poet having fun? (Ibn Quzman's zajal no. 133)',
in Wright and
Rowson (eds.), Homoeroticism, pp. 107 8.

6 M. Chapoutot Ramadi, 'Femmes dans la ville mamluke', JESHO, 38
(1995), p. 148.

7 A. 'Abd ar Raziq, Lafemme au temps des mamlouks en Egypte (Cairo,
1973), p. 35.

357

The New Cambridge History of Islam

such as Ahmad al Badawi's birthday in Tanta. A more profane location for the
free mingling of men and women was along the shores of the Nile, and on the
river itself, where boats carried a mixed company for pleasure trips. The space
surrounding rivers, such as the Nile in Cairo or the Guadalquivir in Seville,
developed into areas of transgression, where social norms of segregation were
suspended, to the great scandal of moralists.

The law court was perhaps the locale where the public presence of women
was unquestionably admitted. Court registers, when preserved, and literary
documents of many kinds, are full of instances of women who conducted
lawsuits in defence of their interests. In the Ottoman registers of the Imperial
Council, which was a kind of supreme court, women's petitions are frequently
noted as complaints against corrupt judges, trustees of religious endowments

and other high officials in their places of residence. 9 In fact, it is thanks to the
gender blind character of the Islamic legal system that we now have such detailed information about the social, economic and family problems affecting
women.

Disapproval or condemnation of women's visibility in public spaces was elevated to the category of a social and religious ideal, at least for the upper
classes of society. In these circles a two faced image of women was created and
developed by the learned members of the community, reflecting and adopting
male anxieties about women's sexuality. As in other non Muslim cultures a
case in point is the Christian Mediterranean space 'good' women were characterised by their obedience, religiosity, modesty and chastity. 10 These
were the virtues expected from the women in well to do families, whose honour had to be protected from outside dangers. But the other side of the
coin was the potential threat that these same women posed, as active, sexually
uncontrolled agents who could undermine the genealogical purity of the patrilineal family." A continuous literary output, very similar in fact to

8 A. Schimmel, 'Eros heavenly and not so heavenly in Sufi literature and life', in
A. L. al Sayyid Marsot (ed.), Society and the sexes in medieval Islam (Malibu, 1979), p. 12.0.

9 F. Zarinebaf Shahr, 'Women, law, and imperial justice in Ottoman Istanbul in the late
seventeenth century', in Amira El Azhary Sonbol (ed.), Women, the family, and divorce
laws in Islamic history (Syracuse, 1996).

10 H. Lutfi, 'al Sakhawl's Kitab al nisa' as a source for the social and economic history of
Muslim women during the fifteenth century AD', The Muslim World, 21 (1981), p. no. See
also N. El Cheikh, 'In search of the ideal spouse', JESHO, 45 (2002). A similar paradigm
appears in the Jewish culture of the Middle East: see R. Lamdan, A separate people: Jewish

women in Palestine, Syria and Egypt in the sixteenth century (Leiden, 2000), pp. 13 14.

11 S. H. Oberhelman, 'Hierarchies of gender, ideology, and power, in ancient and medieval
Greek and Arabic dream literature', in Wright and Rowson (eds.), Homoeroticism, p. 67.

contemporary misogynist attitudes in the Western world, underlined the capacity of women for deceiving men, using as authoritative references texts from the Qur'an and the Prophetic tradition. 12 The 'tricks of women'
genre is well represented by the work of the ninth/fifteenth century Ibn al Batanum, the Kitab al 'Unwanfi makayld al niswan. 13

Fear of the 'disorder' (fitna) created by unrestricted women can be detected
in apocalyptic traditions linking the upside down reality of the last Hour with
the abomination of women circulating freely in the urban landscape and asserting their own sexual personality. 14 Veiling and seclusion were thus
considered to be the guardians of the social and religious order, and trangres
sions against this ideal could only result in punishment for the community.
When, in 841/1438, Egypt suffered from plague and famine, the Mamluk sultan Barsbay asked the religious scholars (l ulama') about the causes of
these misfortunes. Their answer was unanimous: the presence of women in
the streets was the first reason for God's punishment on the Egyptian realm.
Immediately, the sultan issued a decree ordering women to stay at home. 15

Beyond the images created and sustained by the male learned elite, women

occupied crucial spaces in the social scene. We have just seen how their public

presence, although heavily conditioned by moral censorship, is consistently

documented both by its denunciation and the decrees forbidding it. More

problematic was women's access to positions allowing them to preside over

men. Women were excluded from judgeship and from directing the commu

nal prayer in the mosque (although there is an instance of a woman who, in

615/1218, delivered the funeral sermon for Saladin's brother, al 'Adil). 1

12 F. Malti Douglas, Woman 's body, woman's word: Gender and discourse in Arabo Islamic
writing (Princeton, 1991), pp. 49ff.; on Prophetic tradition demeaning to women see
K. Abou El Fadl, Speaking in God's name: Islamic law, authority and women (Oxford, 2001),
pp. 209 63.

13 Malti Douglas, Woman's body, woman's word, p. 54. See also the reflections of R. Irwin,
''All al Baghdad! and the joy of Mamluk sex', in Hugh Kennedy (ed.), Tfie historiography
of Islamic Egypt (c. g;o 1800) (Leiden, 2001), p. 56, on 'All al Baghdad!' s Kitab al Zahr al
Aniq; for Irwin the book, although belonging to the same medieval genre, reflects the
admiration of its author for the cunning and quick wittedness of women. A. M. Edde
('Images de femmes en Syrie a l'epoque ayyoubide', in Patrick Henriet and Anne Marie
Legras (eds.), Au cloitre et dans le monde: Femmes, hommes et societes (IXe XVe siecle):
Melanges en Vhonneur de Paulette L'Hermite Leclercq (Paris, 2000), pp. 71 6) has located, in
Arab chronicles from Syria, the stereotype of the witch, a threatening image for
masculine sexuality.

14 W. Saleh, 'The woman as a locus of apocalyptic anxiety in medieval Sunni Islam', in
Angelika Neuwirth, Birgit Embalo, Sebastian Gunther and Maher Jarrar (eds.), Myths,

historical archetypes and symbolic figures in Arabic literature (Beirut, 1999), pp. 142 3.

15 Lutfi, 'Manners and customs', p. 101.

16 Edde, 'Images de femmes', p. 69.

The New Cambridge History of Islam

Intervention of women in political affairs was severely disapproved of, and
their actual assumption of power a scandal which would bring all kinds of
disasters to the community. However, the variety of cultural traditions and
of historical situations within Islamic history allowed different women and
in very different positions to share a certain degree of political power
with men. In the Maghrib, one of the arguments used by the Almohads
against their predecessors, the Almoravids, was that after 5oo/no6f. women
of the Almoravid royal family had taken over the affairs of the state. 17
Historical evidence points indeed to a greater presence of women in the
political scene under the Almoravids, who were of Berber origins. 1 But no
woman in the Almoravid ruling family took the unprecedented step of
exercising political power by herself the most distinguished woman in the
family, Zaynab al Nafzawiya, financed the career of her husband, Yusuf ibn
Tashfin (d. 500/1106), and became his most trusted adviser.

Two women's names have attracted the attention of contemporary scholar
ship, as they were rulers in their own right, and their names were even
mentioned in the Friday sermon: the Yemenite Arwa (d. 532/1138) and the
Egyptian Shajar al Durr (d. 655/1257). I9 The only common fact linking these
women's biographies is their exceptionality as feminine rulers; otherwise,

their careers and circumstances could not be more dissimilar. The long reign
of Arwa, who received the title Sayyida Hurra ('the noble free woman') was
closely associated with the Fatimid dynasty and the propagation of Isma'ili
doctrines, and she reigned in Yemen after marrying the Sulayhid Ahmad
al Mukarram, who soon retired from public life and then died, leaving Arwa
in charge of public affairs. Shajar al Durr, for her part, was originally a slave,
married to one of the last Ayyubids, al Salih Ayyub. Her short reign was the
prelude to the Mamluk takeover, and although she controlled the army and
the treasury for a while, she found it impossible to perform other duties
expected of Muslim sovereigns, such as presiding over public ceremonies and
military parades. She was finally murdered in obscure circumstances.

Exceptional as they are, the figures of these two women should not over
shadow other more usual exercises of political power by women. Regency for
a minor son or grandson was a not infrequent possibility, as happened in

17 Marin, Mujeres en alAndalus, p. 243.

18 It has been proposed by some historians and anthropologists that women enjoyed
a greater autonomy in a Berber environment. Incidentally, Almohads were, like
Almoravids, of Berber origins, although from a different tribal network.

19 See the works by F. Daftary, M. Chapoutot Ramadi, L. al Imad and G. Schregle cited in
the chapter bibliography.

360

the case of the renowned Dayfa Khatun (d. 640/1243) in Ayyubid Aleppo.
20
Several women who were mothers of Mamluk sultans are described by Arab
chroniclers as having great influence over their sons in the conduct of political
affairs, such as the mother of Baraka Khan, or Khawand Ashlun, who was the
mother of al Nasir Muhammad ibn Qalawun. 21 In the Maghrib another
'Sayyida Hurra', this time called 'A'isha bint 'All, succeeded in installing her
son in law as governor of Tetuan in 944/1537, while herself exercising de facto
governorship until 949/1542, when she was expelled from the city. She then
took up residence in her birthplace of Xauen and spent the rest of her life
there, devoting herself to pious activities until her death in 969/1562. 22 But it
was perhaps under Ottoman rule that women acquired a more significant role
as mothers of sovereigns and princes, over whose households they presided.
As the walide sultan (an official title consecrating her position) the mother of
the reigning Ottoman monarch became a political entity of first importance. 23
Arab and Turkish chronicles did not approve of the role played by
women in the dynastic policies of the Mamluks and Ottomans, and, not
suprisingly, they identified the pre eminence of women with decadence and
corruption in political and social affairs. 24 The traditional view required an
explanation for the unusual entry of women into the political arena, and this
was more often than not the seductive powers of women over their royal
husbands, whose will they were able to dominate by all kinds of means,
including magic arts. 25 In all the cases presented here, however, the com
mon factor is that the political agency of women was necessarily linked to
the presence of a man: brother, husband or son. In the great imperial
dynasties, such as the Mamluks and the Ottomans, women could became
and in fact did become, under the Ottomans powerful figures in the inner
circles of the palace; always, however, as necessary elements in the family
politics of the dynasty.

20 See Y. Tabbaa, 'Dayfa Khatun, regent queen and architectural patron', in D. Fairchild
Ruggles (ed.), Women, patronage and self representation in Islamic societies (Albany, 2000).
On the limits of Arab historical sources for recovering women's activities in the context
of royal families see M.J. Viguera, 'A borrowed space: Andalusi and Maghribi women in
chronicles', in Marin and Deguilhem (eds.), Writing the feminine.

21 'Abd ar Raziq, Lafemme au temps des mamlouks, p. 27.

22 C. de La Veronne, 'Sida el Horra, la noble dame', Hesperis, 48 (1956).

23 L. Peirce, The imperial harem: Women and sovereignty in the Ottoman empire (Oxford and
New York, 1993).

24 They are sometimes followed in this interpretation by modern scholarship (see Irwin,
''AH al Baghdad!', p. 48).

25 Peirce, The imperial harem, p. 63.

361

The New Cambridge History of Islam

At all levels of society family was indeed the privileged space for women's
lives, as both the religious and the social ideal consider women primarily as
wives and mothers. The classical orientalist view of the patriarchical Muslim
family as following the 'oriental despot model' in which the paterfamilias
exercised an absolute power over the members of the household has been
challenged by recent research. On the one hand, multiple relationships were

created within the family, developing a variety of hierarchies among men and
women, age groups and slave /free members of the household. On the other,
the main characteristic of the Muslim family was the fact that these relation
ships were governed by a set of legal rules, giving every individual, male or
female, rights and obligations. Thus marriage contracts, divorce or repudi
ation, polygamy and economic autonomy, all questions deeply affecting
women's lives, were under the provisions of Muslim law, and the access of
women to courts, as already pointed out, facilitated the role of the judicial
agents as mediators in family conflicts. 2

The protection of the law did not apply equally to all women. Those living
in cities or towns with a judge or, even better, belonging to the middle and
upper classes were more likely to be shielded from infringements of their
rights. In rural or tribal contexts it seems that customary law, often damaging
to women's interests, could prevail over Islamic norms, as is shown in the case
of the twelfth/ eighteenth century Moroccan scholar al KikI, active in the
mountains of the Middle High Atlas. Al KikI wrote a juridical opinion
(fatwa) trying to convince his fellow tribesmen that they were behaving
unfairly towards their women, who, contrary to the requirements of Islamic
law, were obliged to donate their lawful properties to their male relatives. 27

Central to the rights of married women was the establishment of a marriage
contract. As an indispensable condition for the validity of a marriage, this
document could prevent harmful actions on the part of the husband towards
the psychological and economic well being of his wife. Several clauses in the
contract established the amount of the dowry to be paid to the bride (usually
divided in two parts: one paid when the contract was signed; and the second
delayed in anticipation of a divorce or of widowhood), the length of absence
accorded to the husband from the marital home, conditions for the residence
of the married couple etc. Of significant relevance was the clause by

which the husband renounced marriage to a second woman or the taking

2.6 N. Hanna, 'Marriage among merchant families in seventeenth century Cairo', in Sonbol

(ed.), Women, the family, and divorce laws.
27 Muhammad ibn 'Abd Allah al KikI, Mawahib dhi Ijaldlfi nawazil al bilad al sa'iba min

aljibal, ed. Ahmad Tawfiq (Beirut, 1997).

362

Women, gender and sexuality

of a concubine. Contract marriages in eleventh/seventeenth century Cairo
include clauses allowing a woman who was a peddler to continue her trade
after marriage, or another stipulating that her husband would permit her to go
to the public bath, to visit and be visited by friends and relatives, and to
perform the pilgrimage to Mecca. Physical mistreatment could be foreseen as
a cause for divorce and so be written into the marriage contract. 2

Polygamy and unilateral divorce by the husband were the more serious
threats to married women's welfare. It would seem, however, that polygamy,
outside the sovereign families and other exceptional cases, was not as frequent
as divorce and remarriage. Research based upon Ottoman archives from
'Aintab in the tenth/sixteenth century and Bursa in the eleventh/seventeenth
agree that polygamy was either non existent or at a very low incidence level,
and the same conclusion has been reached in the case of the elite group of
Ottoman scholars in the twelfth/ eighteenth century. 29 The Mamluk elites, on

the other hand, are described as very prone to polygamy, although the lack of
archival evidence means that research has to rely on biographical and literary
documents describing only selected social groups. 30 In the case of the ruling
families, polygamy was such a common trait that the monogamous marriage
of the Mamluk sultan Inal al Ajrud and Zaynab was considered a unique case
among their peers. 31

Repudiation and divorce affected women's position in other ways. Islamic
law accords to husbands the unilateral right of divorcing their wives, a right
slightly tempered by the condition of paying them the delayed part of the
dowry and providing for their sustenance and that of minor children (nafaqa).
The legal conditions for repudiation and divorce varied from one juridical
school to another, and it is noteworthy that in eleventh/ seventeenth century
Jerusalem the majority of divorce cases were brought before the Shafi'I judge,
probably because this particular school is less rigorous than others in its
attitude to women. 32 Similarly, and notwithstanding the fact that the Hanafi
juridical school was the 'official' school of the Ottoman empire, Hanafi jurists

28 Hanna, 'Marriage among merchant families'; A. Abdal Rehim, 'The family and gender
laws in Egypt', in Sonbol (ed.), Women, the family and divorce Jaws.

29 Peirce, Morality tales, p. 150; H. Gerber, 'Social and economic position of women in an
Ottoman city, Bursa, 1600 1700', IJMES, 12 (1980); M. Zilfi, 'Elite circulation in the
Ottoman empire: Great mollas of the eighteenth century', JESHO, 26 (1983).

30 Lutfi, 'al SakhawT's Kitab al nisd'', p. 123; 'Abd ar Raziq, Lafemme au temps des mamlouks,
p. 164.

31 Lutfi, 'al Sakhawi's Kitab al nisd'', p. 115.

32 D. Ze'evi, 'Women in 17th century Jerusalem: Western and indigenous perspectives',
IJMES, 27 (1995), P- 165-

363

would advise deserted wives to go to judges of the other orthodox schools of
law, because their own did not allow divorce in these cases unless two
witnesses could confirm that the absent husband had died or that he had
been missing for fifteen years. 33 In al Andalus and the Maghrib, according to
the Malikls, physical mistreatment of a woman by her husband was reason
enough for her to apply for a divorce, and the court would then initiate an
enquiry in the neighbourhood and among friends and relatives, to check the
facts given by the plaintiff. 34

Besides the non fulfilment of the clauses in the marriage contract (as might
have happened in the examples just mentioned), women could initiate the
proceedings for divorce for personal reasons, just as their husbands could
repudiate them. In such cases wives were obliged to 'compensate' their
husbands economically, either by renouncing the payment of the delayed
part of the dowry or by handing over part of their property. 35 This is the
divorce called khul\ which was obviously more easily obtained by wealthy
women, who were able to bargain for their freedom. But even women from
the lower classes of society chose khuV as an option, as attested in twelfth/
eighteenth century Istanbul, as the only way out of their marriages. The
counterpart of this legal possibility is documented in the same city, where
cases are recorded of men forcing their wives to initiate a divorce khuV to
avoid paying them the delayed part of their dowries. 36

Conflict in a marriage might not always end in a divorce or a repudiation.
Before this drastic step was taken relatives and friends could intervene as
mediators, and the court could nominate two arbiters, one from the family of
the wife and another from the husband's family. From the fifth /eleventh
century, in what is today's Tunisia, there existed an institution called Mr
al thiqa ('the house of trust'), where a couple in a difficult situation could
stay under supervision in the hope of resolving their problems, or where
mistreated women could take refuge from their husbands. 37 Mutual agree
ments of divorce between wife and husband were also possible. An Andalusi
document dated 751/1350 attests to the 'incompatibility of character' between

33 R. C.Jennings, 'Women in early 17th century Ottoman judicial records: The sharia court
of Anatolian Kayseri', JESHO, 18 (1975), p. 93.

34 Marin, Mujeres en al Andalus, pp. 455 9.

35 Peirce, Morality tales, p. 232, underlines how women in 'Aintab were obliged to pay in
order to retain custody of their children, although this was contrary to sharTa and
reflected the customary law of the city.

36 Zarinebaf Shahr, 'Women, law, and imperial justice', p. 92.

37 D. and A. Largueche, Marginales en terre d'Islam (Tunis, 1992), p. 91.

364

Women, gender and sexuality

the judge and poet Abu '1 Barakat al Balafiqi and his wife, 'A'isha bint Abi [Abd

Allah ibn al Maghili, and their agreement put an end to their marriage. 3

It was usual for women to marry at an early age, 39 and not infrequently to
much older men. Widowhood was therefore a common occurrence in many
women's lives; together with the high possibility of being divorced or repu
diated, this made remarriage a frequent possibility. A woman in a good
economic position could make her own choice for a second or third marriage,
while her first marriage was generally arranged by her family. The choice of a
husband was in any case very much conditioned by the social provenance of
the bride. Families of high social standing did not allow their daughters to
marry commoners, and economic parity between the parties was also consid
ered necessary. Marriage alliances were common among the learned elite of
the Islamic cities, and cases of disciples marrying their masters' daughters or
sisters are frequently mentioned in biographical sources. Scholarly networks
in this way acquired a genealogical character, in which women figured as the
ineluctable link between families. 40 Exceptions to the rule, religiously sane
tioned, of the 'equality' between wife and husband can, however, be found in
specific cases. Thus the Ottoman ruling family developed the policy of
marrying the royal princesses to high officials of the court, usually of slave
origin, in order to cement the network of personal loyalties around the
sovereign. 41 On their side, Mamluks often married the daughters, sisters and
widows of their masters. 42

In well off households, female slaves and concubines played an important
role in the matrimonial strategies and reproduction of the family. Slaves could
change their status; in ninth/fifteenth century Bursa young slave girls were
frequently manumitted by their female owners and married off. 43 But the
fate of slave women belonging to the male head of the family could be
very different if they became mothers to their owner's children. Children by

these slaves were as legitimate as the offspring of a legal marriage, and they
had the same rights to their father's estate. But it was not in the interests of a

38 S. Gibert, 'Abu 1 Barakat al Balafiqi, qadi, historiador y poeta', al Andalus, 28 (1963),
p. 408.

39 A. Giladi, 'Gender differences in child rearing and education: Some preliminary
observations with reference to medieval Muslim thought', al Qantara, 16 (1995), p. 303.

40 M. Marin, 'Parentesco simbolico y matrimonio entre los ulemas andalusies', al Qantara,
16 (1995).

41 Peirce, The imperial harem, pp. 65 77.

42 M. A. Fay, 'The ties that bound: Women and households in eighteenth century Egypt',
in Sonbol (ed.), Women, the family, and divorce laws, pp. 164 5.

43 S. Faroqhi, Stories of Ottoman men and women: Establishing status, establishing control
(Istanbul, 2002), p. 148.

well to do family to duplicate the number of heirs, and disperse possessions
especially real estate. Thus male owners of slave women, with whom they had
the right to have sexual relations, used to practice coitus interruptus with
them, something that theoretically at least they could not do with their

legitimate wives, unless they so agreed (only Shafi'i jurists did not consider
the wife's permission necessary). 44 Contraception was admitted as a social
practice, and religious writers and jurists permitted it, on the assumption that
no human initiative would impede God's will to create a human being.
Among the reasons for practising contraception, the great thinker al Ghazali
(d. 505/1111) cited keeping the family to a reasonable size, and preserving
women's beauty; this, however, was a decision to be taken by a man, not by a
woman, and seems to relate to slave women rather than to free and legitimate
wives. The uncertainties of coitus interruptus as a contraceptive method were
also taken into account, and in the eighth/fourteenth century the Damascene
jurist Ibn Qayyim aljawziyya reported that some of his trusted friends had
told him that although they had been practising withdrawal, their wives had
become pregnant. 45 For women, to become a mother and, more significantly,
the mother of a son, was to acquire the full status of mature adulthood, and
within the family hierarchy, a fundamental step towards a rise in status over
younger and childless women.

It was also through their family connections that women acquired, for the
most part, their own properties either as dowries or as shares in estates. The
amount of the dowry reflected the social position of both families, as well as
the personal situation of the bride (a virgin, a divorcee or a widow, with or
without children, could receive different amounts of money as dowry). 46
Although the dowry was the personal possession of the bride, it was not
infrequent for her family to use it or at least part of it to buy her trousseau,
including household linens and wares. The delayed part of the dowry, as we
have seen, could never be paid if a wife renounced her rights in order to obtain
what some jurists called 'conjugal harmony'. Similarly, as women's shares in
estates were normally parts of a property and not its entirety, they were under

pressure from their menfolk to sell off their portions. In eleventh/
seventeenth century Kayseri women sold properties at a rate of three
times
more than men, because it was common for women, on the death of their

44 B. Musallam, Sex and society in Islam: Birth control before the
nineteenth century
(Cambridge, 1983), p. 28.

45 Ibid., pp. 19 22.

46 A. Zomefio, Dote y matrimonio en alAndalus y el norte de Africa:
Estudios sobre la
jurisprudencia isldmica medieval (Madrid, 2000).

Women, gender and sexuality

parents, to sell their shares in the estates to their brothers. 47 On the
whole,
however, the quantity and quality of data about women defending their
property rights before judges across the centuries are proof of the
continuous
implementation of women's right to property, even if they attest to the
precariousness of their position.

Muslim jurists from the formative period of Islam, such as Malik ibn
Anas,
carefully defined the kind of goods normally belonging to women, such as
household wares, cooking utensils, clothing and house linen, and jewels.
48
Similarly, research on Damascene inventories from 1099 1130/ 1687
1717 has
shown that women and men did not own the same things. Women, for
example, possessed practically no books, weapons or riding animals; but
they owned gold, jewellery and clothing. It is noteworthy that cooking
utensils were owned by both men and women, but the former possessed
heavy objects in copper, while the latter owned lighter things, made from

ceramics, glass or porcelain. 49 Similar conclusions have been reached for
women living in tenth/ sixteenth century Uskiidar and c Aintab, and in Ottoman Algiers. 50

Although the tendency to sell their real estate properties is well attested, women could and did own houses, gardens and vineyards. Regional differ ences in the kind of properties owned by women have been observed. In central Anatolian towns, for example, it was more common for women to possess orchards and fields (especially after the tenth/ sixteenth century) than
in a city such as Aleppo. 51 In Nasrid Granada women appear in archival documents as proprietors of shares in houses, small plots of land and shops. 52 Moreover, in the Ottoman realm the eleventh/seventeenth century
witnessed an increase in female proprietors of land, following changes to the
rules governing tenure of state owned lands. 53 Women's ownership of real

47 Zarinebaf Shahr, 'Women, law, and imperial justice', p. 90; Jennings, 'Women in early
17th century Ottoman judicial records', pp. 69 71.

48 Marin, Mujeres en al Andalus, p. 315.

49 C. Establet and J. P. Pascual, 'Women in Damascene families around 1700', JESHO, 45
(2002).

50 Y.J. Seng, 'Invisible women: Residents of early sixteenth century Istanbul', in
G. R. G. Hambly (ed.), Women in rite medieval Islamic world: Power, patronage, and
piety (Basingstoke and New York, 1998), p. 262; Peirce, Morality tales, pp. 221 6;
'A'isha Ghattas, 'Mumtalakat al mar'a fi mujtama' madinat al Jaza'ir khilal al 'ahd
al 'uthmanf, in Dalenda Largueche (ed.), Historie des femmes au Maghreb: Culture
materielle et vie quotidienne (Tunis, 2000).

51 Faroqhi, Stories of Ottoman men and women, pp. 152 4.

52 Marin, Mujeres en al Andalus, pp. 328 9.

53 Faroqhi, Stories of Ottoman men and women, pp. 152 4; Ze'evi, 'Women in 17th century
Jerusalem', p. 167.

estate, however threatened by male relatives, was protected by law and
custom, but management and control of these properties were frequently in
the hands of men husbands or brothers. This would also explain why
women were ready to sell their properties and obtain money, a commodity
easier to control and manage than land, and exchangeable for jewels, clothing
and other similar goods.

As money owners, women tended to act as their families' 'bankers', grant
ing loans to their relatives, especially their husbands. Loaning money seems to
have been a very common activity among well to do women in different
times and places, such as in Bursa, Kayseri, Jerusalem or Istanbul, where they
charged high rates of interest (10 20 per cent). 54 Some women invested in
commercial enterprises, as happened in Ottoman Cairo and Bursa. 55 Class
played a crucial role in acquiring and maintaining women's wealth, as can be
observed particularly in the case of the Egyptian Mamluks. Women from the
most important Mamluk families could own enormous fortunes, and they also
served as custodians of property, keeping it in the family after the death of
their husbands. 56

Rich women gave away a substantial part of their wealth in the form of gifts

and donations made to relatives, but also as contributions to the community's
welfare. Charitable endowments (waqf, pi. awqaf in the Muslim west hubs,
pi. ahbas) were a characteristic feature of social life in Islamic societies. Their
creation and development did not evolve from any Qur'anic injunction, but
waqf soon acquired religious legitimacy. Founders of awqaf contributed to the
Islamic ideals of justice and redistribution of wealth, and in doing so acquired
individual religious merit (ajf). Because women were economically independ
ent under Muslim law, they were also able to establish awqaf and in this way
charitable endowment presented a non gendered opportunity for them to take part in social and religious affairs.

Obviously the wealthier a woman was, the greater her capacity for donat
ing properties to be established as pious foundations. Thus women belonging
to royal families appear predominandy as founders of rich awqaf established
in favour of mosques, hospitals or schools. In Ayyubid Damascus women's

54 Zarinebaf Shahr, 'Women, law, and imperial justice', p. 91.

55 A. L. al Sayyid Marsot, 'Entrepreneurial women in Egypt', in Mai Yamani (ed.),
Feminism and Islam: Legal and literary perspectives (Reading, 1996); Gerber, 'Social and
economic position of women'.

56 C.F. Petty, 'Class solidarity versus gender gain: Women as custodians of property in
later medieval Egypt', in Keddie and Baron (eds.), Women in Middle Eastern history,
pp. 124 6.

support for madrasas and Sufi hospices was significant. Of the twenty eight
Ayyubid patrons recorded as founders of this kind of institution only fifteen
were men. 57 The case of Dayfa Khatun in seventh/ thirteenth century
Aleppo has attracted the attention of contemporary research. The Madrasat
al Firdaws, which she financed, is still preserved as the centre of one of
Aleppo's quarters,' 8 as is the case with several Sufi convents, madrasas and
funerary monuments endowed by women in Mamluk Cairo. 59 But it was
perhaps under the Ottomans that royal women left a more remarkable legacy
on the urban landscape through their funding of monumental mosques
and madrasas in the most important cities of the empire. Mihrimah Sultan,
daughter of Suleyman (r. 926 74/1520 66) was the founder of one of the most
renowned mosque complexes in Istanbul, and hers was not the only example;
generation after generation of Ottoman royal ladies added their own contri
bution to the establishment of charitable endowments, some of them of an
innovative character, such as public kitchens (imaret) where food was distrib
uted to the poor. ° The charitable careers of these women were linked to their
places in the sultanic household and to their own position as wives and
mothers. Modern research has identified a hierarchy of female patronage,
related to the women's status as mothers of princes. Before the reign of
Suleyman royal women financed building only in the provinces, where they
resided as mothers to sons appointed as governors by the reigning sultan.
After Suleyman's time, and due in part to his own special relationship with his
favourite concubine, Hurrem, older women in the imperial harem took
over the task of establishing charitable endowments in Istanbul, in a process
paralleling the growing political influence of the queen mother (walide sultan).

Specific endowments providing for destitute or helpless women were
established by wealthy women, such as the Egyptian Fatima (ninth /fifteenth
century), who founded a convent (zawiya) for widows, where she herself
resided. 2 In Ottoman Uskiidar several women in the tenth/ sixteenth century
established foundations for house loans, which were of course open to both

57 R. S. Humphreys, 'Women as patrons of religious architecture in Ayyubid Damascus',
Muqarnas, n (1994).

58 Tabbaa, 'Dayfa Khatun'.

59 Petry, 'Class solidarity versus gender gain', pp. 132 6; 'Abd ar Raziq, Lafemme au temps
des mamlouks, pp. 2off.

60 Seng, 'Invisible women', p. 245.

61 L. Peirce, 'Gender and sexual propriety in Ottoman royal women's patronage', in
Ruggles (ed.), Women, patronage and self representation.

62 Lutfi, 'al Sakhawi's Kitab al nisa", p. 119.

369

The New Cambridge History of Islam

men and women. 63 This practical approach to charity can be recognised in
other aspects of the beneficence exercised by women. Examples extend from
the activities of a royal concubine such as the Ottoman Kosem (who financed
annual distributions of clothes and food for the poor, or water supplies for

pilgrims) to women of more modest means who offered their help to poor
brides, allowing them to acquire trousseaus or to hire jewels for their
wedding
ceremonies.

Women from the lower classes participated in economic activity through
their paid work and their unsalaried domestic production. Wage labour
was
more common in cities, where women could work in a great variety of
jobs.
Legally women were the sole owners of their earnings, but their rights in
this
respect were not always respected by their male relatives. Husbands
could
even forbid their wives to work outside the home. In eighth/fourteenth
century Ifriqiya a hairdresser took the precaution of inserting a clause
into
her marriage contract guaranteeing her right to continue working; after
the
marriage, however, the husband tried to forbid her to work 64 In spite of
these
encroachments on their participation in the world of labour, information
abounds about women working as wet nurses, midwives, servants,
spinners,
cooks, hairdressers, schoolteachers, bath attendants etc. 65 Restrictions
on
the public appearance of high class women favoured the activity of
female
peddlers, who acted as links between rich households. Hairdressers
(mashita)
specialising in wedding celebrations were very much sought after, and
some
of them earned high incomes. Generally speaking, women occupied a
gendered sector of the work space, as most of the tasks they performed
were centred on the domestic area or answered needs caused by gender
segregation. High skilled professional women were not common,
although
in particular circumstances we find cases such as the Banu Zuhr family,
famous Andalusi physicians. The daughter of one of them, Umm c Amr
bint
Abi Marwan (d. after 580/1184) was a renowned medical practitioner,
who
treated the women of the ruling Almohad dynasty, and who was even
consulted by her male colleagues. 67

Domestic production of goods was a general practice, giving women the
advantage of not risking their reputations by mingling freely with men in
the

63 Seng, 'Invisible women', p. 245.

64 M. Shatzmiller, 'Women and wage labour in the medieval Islamic west: Legal issues in
an economic context', JESHO, 40 (1997), p. 189.

65 Lutfi, 'Manners and customs', p. 106.

66 'Abd ar Raziq, Lafemme au temps des mamhuks, p. 44.

67 Marin, Mujeres en al Andalus, pp. 296 7.

Women, gender and sexuality

streets or the markets. Spinning and other textile related tasks were the preferred activities in this domain, with regional specialities such as silk spinning in eleventh/ seventeenth century Bursa, where in 1089/1678, of a
total of 300 silk spinning implements, as many as 150 were owned and/ or
operated by women. Embroiderers were present in the Sevillian market, where they had a special place to sell their handiwork. In Ottoman times embroidery was a highly sophisticated art, and it was cultivated not only by
women in the royal palace, but also by many others who made a living from
it. 69 Less well documented are other areas of domestic production, among
which food preparation and conservation was probably one of the most important tasks performed by women.

Beyond this 'legitimate' work space lies the area of dishonourable profes sions: singers, dancers, prostitutes, public mourners, charms makers, procur
esses etc. 70 Singing, like wine drinking, was often associated with prostitution

and, in fact, singers paid taxes as prostitutes did in various historical periods. In
Ayyubid and Mamluk times the state earned significant amounts from these
taxes. While some rulers discontinued them, others, such as the Ayyubid al Mu'azzam c Isa in 615/1218, restored them, justifying his decision on the
grounds that he had to pay his army. 71 Similar oscillations are documented
during the Mamluk period, when prostitutes were obliged to inscribe their
names in a general register, and to pay taxes to the controller of prostitution
who could be also a woman. But Mamluk rulers such as Baybars I or al Nasir
Muhammad ibn Qalawun directed their policy of redressing public morality
against prostitutes, who were forbidden to work, jailed or, in some cases, obliged to marry. Notwithstanding these bouts of repression, prostitution and
other related activities flourished uninterruptedly, sometimes under cover of
other economic activities, such as the slave traffic. 72

The world of learning and of religious knowledge was, in principle, open to Muslim women. In an autobiographical note Ibn Hazm (d. 456/1064) explained how during his childhood the women of his family taught him

68 Gerber, 'Social and economic position of women', p. 237; Faroqhi, Stories of Ottoman men
and women, p. 202.

69 Peirce, Morality tales, p. 223.

70 On the religiously based disapproval of the mourner see El Cheikh, 'Mourning and the
role of the na'iha', in Cristina de la Puente (ed.), Identidades marginales, Estudios
Onomastico Biograficos de al Andalus 13 (Madrid, 2003).

71 L. Pouzet, Damas au Vlle/VIIIe Steele: Vie et structures religeuses dans une metropole islam
ique (Beirut, 1991), p. 326.

72 M. Zilfi, 'Servants, slaves, and the domestic order the Ottoman Middle East', Hawwa, 2
(2004), p. 6.

The New Cambridge History of Islam

the Qur] an, classical Arabic poetry and calligraphy. As a member of an
aristocratic household in fifth/eleventh century Cordoba, Ibn Hazm
identified
the areas of learning women of this social standing might be familiar
with: the
sacred Qur'anic text, the culturally praised and memorised archive of
Arabic
poetry and the art of writing for religious and secular purposes, such as
copying the Qur'an or classical poetry.

For the most part, however, it was considered dangerous for women to
write, 73 because they could use this skill for unlawful communication
with
men. It was only in the context of scholarly or high class families that
women
were allowed to introduce themselves into the world of specialised
learning,
taking advantage of the fact that they could be taught by the male
members of
their families. Fathers, brothers or husbands were the natural masters of
intelligent women, who might aspire to high levels of knowledge, and
who
eventually became famous teachers or transmitters of knowledge in their
own
right. These are usually the kinds of women who are featured in special
sections of biographical dictionaries, texts which confirm the written
register
of high Muslim culture throughout the ages. 74 Women were taught by
their
relatives or by unrelated male teachers; in the latter case it was
customary that
a curtain separated the master from his disciples. 75 Gender segregation
in
public spaces hindered the presence of women in the madrasas, the most
important institution of high learning in the Muslim world from the fifth/

eleventh century onwards. Significantly, women could and did found madra

sas, as we have seen above, but they could not attend their courses or be teachers there. Thus women were removed from the master and disciple network dominating the world of learning, and only in exceptional cases did

they appear as masters of some renown. This happened mainly in the specialised field of hadith (the Prophet's tradition), for which old age was a

premium, in so far as the older the transmitter, the fewer the links in a chain of

transmission. Moreover, senior women, in a post sexual phase of their lives,

were not subjected to strict gender segregation, and therefore they could teach freely to male disciples. 76 But it has to be noted that in spite of their

73 Giladi, 'Gender differences in child rearing'.

74 See a detailed study of the place of women in this kind of work, in R. Roded, Women in
Islamic biographical collections: from Ibn Sa'd to Who's who (London, 1994).

75 Edde, 'Images de femmes', p. 68; M. L. Avila, 'Las "mujeres sabias" en al Andalus', in
Maria Jesus Viguera (ed.), La mujer en al Andalus: Reflejos historicos de su actividad y
categorias sociales (Madrid and Seville, 1989), pp. 139 84; M. L. Avila, 'Women in
Andalusi biographical sources', in Marin and Deguilhem (eds.), Writing the feminine.

76 J. P. Berkey, Women and Islamic education in the Mamluk period', in Keddie and
Baron (eds.), Women in Middle Eastern history, pp. 151 3.

contribution to the field ofhadith women were rarely if at all authors of books
on this or other scholarly matters. 77

Secular culture, poetry and music were cultivated by women, particularly but not exclusively by slaves who had received a careful training in artistic performances. Best known are female poets from al Andalus, where several names emerge from obscurity, such as the sixth/twelfth century Hafsa bint al Hajj al Rakuniya and Nazhun bint al Qala c I The former frequented aristo cratic circles and is known for her love of poetry, while the latter is described as a majina, that is, a poet of transgressive, and even obscene, character. 78

It has been asserted that religion and religious practices were the privileged field for women's agency. Personal piety opened up to women a unique space for the development of individual accomplishments, and in fact, from the earliest Islamic times women figure in the annals of Muslim sainthood. 79
Biographies or short notices on female saints (salihat) appear, although sparsely, in hagiographical dictionaries, a genre particularly rich in North African regions. An analysis of these biographies yields interesting results, as women appear to the eyes of different authors as perfectly integrated in the world of sainthood. ° The most celebrated mystic Muhyi al Din ibn al 'Arabi (d. 638/1240) counted several women among his spiritual masters; two of them, Fatima bint Ibn al Muthanna and Shams Umm al Fuqara', were described by Muhyl al Din with warm expressions of admiration. J The influence of Ibn al 'ArabI in Sufi thought can be appreciated also in the mystical interpretation of sexual relationships, which were equated to the union of God and the human being. Erotic images in Sufi poetry and literature undoubtedly contributed to the consideration of women as partners of men in the search for a higher spiritual life.

The development and spread of religious and mystical brotherhoods (tariqa, pi. turuq) offered other and to some extent more institutional ised ways of performing devotional acts. In Cairo and Damascus Sufi con

vents (ribat, zawiya) were established for women, who could live there,
improving their knowledge of religion and leading a pious and ascetic
life.
These institutions were governed by a mistress of the convent (shaykhat

77 Lutfi, 'al Sakhawi's Kitab al nisd'', p. 120.

78 T. Garulo, Dlwan de las poetisas de al Andalus (Madrid, 1986), pp. 71
85, no 18.

79 A. Schimmel, My soul is a woman: The feminine in Islam, trans. Susan
H. Ray (New York,
1999); M. Chodkiewicz, 'La saintete feminine dans l'hagiographie
islamique', in Denise
Aigle (ed.), Saints orientaux (Paris, 1995).

80 N. Amri, 'Les salihat du Ve au IXe siecle/XIe XVe siecle dans la
memoire maghrebine
de la saintete a travers quatre documents hagiographiques', al Qantara,
21 (2000).

81 C. Addas, Ibn 'ArabI ou la quite du soufre rouge (Paris, 1989), pp. 113
14.

al ribat/al zawiya). In the Maghrib the Ribat Shakir was frequented by
women
of saintly reputation, among them Munayya bint Maymun (d. 595/1198),
who
performed miracles similar to those attributed to men.

In conclusion, in hierarchical societies such as pre modern Islamic
society,
women were assimilated with children and slaves. All three categories
were

in need of protection and guidance from men or at least this was the socially
accepted ideal, sanctioned by religious norms. It is clear, however, that women
occupied areas of significant interest in the social arena, and that they were
empowered by the legal rules to govern important areas of their own lives.

Sexuality

A long lived Western tradition characterises Islamic societies by an unbridled
sensuality and a self indulgent allowance of fleshly pleasures. The sultanic
harem, with its alluring images of countless women ready to be enjoyed by
their owner and master, figures prominently in this tradition, initiated by
Medieval Christian polemicists depicting the Prophet of Islam as a lustful man
of licentious proclivities. More recently, a noticeable shift of emphasis presents
the Islamic approach to sexuality in a different way: in contrast to Christianity,
Islam is a sex positive religion, lacking the repressive aspects of Western
historical cultures towards sexuality. 83 Both the traditional and contemporary
interpretations are, however, essentially identical, as they observe Islamic
sexualities from their own problematic relationship with sex: condemnation
of a supposedly uncontrolled lewdness is just the other side of the coin of an
unreserved approval of Islamic sexual mores.

There is, however, a difference of approach to sexuality in Christianity and
Islam that has influenced Western as well as Muslim interpretations. 84 While
for the former sex was at best an unavoidable fact of life, and celibacy the
higher ideal of existence on this earth, for the latter sexual relationships were a
social and individual issue to be regulated and controlled, but never discarded
or suppressed. Muslim moralists and religious thinkers openly admitted the

existence of sexual desire in both women and men. The model of the

82 Amri, 'Les sdlihdt', p. 497.

83 F. Rosenthal, 'Fiction and reality: Sources for the role of sex in medieval Muslim
society', in al Sayyid Marsot (ed.), Society and the sexes, p. 4. A good representative of
the contemporary interpretation is L. Lopez Barak, Un Kama sutra espanol (Madrid,
1992), pp. 207 22.

84 In this sense it is instructive to compare the contrasting views of G. H. Bousquet,
L'Ethique sexuelle de Vlslam (Paris, 1966) and A. Bouhdiba, La sexualite en Islam (Paris,
1975).

374

Women, gender and sexuality

Prophet's life, with his numerous marriages and his enjoyment of sex, undoubtedly played a crucial part in this religiously approved attitude. At the same time, however, the disturbing potential of sex, and especially its capacity of blurring the purity of genealogical descent, demanded clear and
decisive control over how and with whom sexual relationships could be conducted. 5 From almost the beginning of Islamic history, the socially accepted order precluded free and honest women from any contact with unrelated men, and established a sexual hierarchy presided over by men, whose public honour was subject, however, to their women's behaviour.

The social tension between what was expected from men and women (in the first case, to act as a predator towards unrelated females; in the second, to
resist the predatory efforts of the unrelated males) was not exclusive to Islamic

societies, and can easily be recognised in other geographical or chronological
areas. Muslim ideology dealt with the problem in a characteristic way, establishing legal limits and boundaries to sexual relationships. Licit and illicit
acts became, in Islamic societies, markers for sexual activity, and so it was that
illegal sex could be chastened, and legal sex was not only approved but also
religiously sanctioned. As long as the purity of male lineage was not threat
ened, women and men could enjoy sex in legally established marriages.

Literary expressions of transgressive sexual behaviour are common in classical Arabic literature, where there exists a powerful tradition of eroti cism. 87 Sexual misconduct and illicit acts appear complaisantly described in
much of this literature, although these were practices that were deemed socially unacceptable. Anecdotal compilations such as that of al Tifashi (d. 651/1253) coexist with literary discussions on the merits of maidens and
young men, penned by authors such as Shihab al Din al Hijazi (d. 875/1471)
and Abu '1 Tuqa al Badri (d. 894/1489). Although taking erotic texts as testimonials of social indulgence towards irregular sexual activity would be
misleading, their very existence and popularity proves that there was a welcome market for them.

85 J. P. Berkey, 'Circumcision circumscribed: Female excision and cultural accommoda
tion in the medieval Near East', IJMES, 28 (1996), p. 32.

86 L. Peirce, 'Seniority, sexuality, and social order: The vocabulary of gender in early
modern Ottoman Society', in Madeline C. Zilfi (ed.), Women in the Ottoman empire:
Middle Eastern women in tfie early modern era (Leiden, 1997), pp. 184 5.

87 J. C. Biirgel, 'Love, lust, and longing: Eroticism in early Islam as reflected in literary
sources', in al Sayyid Marsot (ed.), Society and the sexes, p. 85; L. Declich, 'L'erotologia
arabe: Profilo bibliografico', Rivista degli Studi Orientali, 68 (1994); Malti Douglas,
Woman's body, woman's word, p. 47; Lopez Barak, Un Kama sutra, pp. 241 61.

88 See on the last two authors Rosenthal, 'Male and female'.

A frequent character in some of the anecdotes included in a book like that of
al Tifashi is the married noblewoman who escapes secretly from her home to
pursue an illicit love affair. This narrative scheme reflects the social anxiety
created around women's bodies, and helps to understand the reactive relation
ship between women's alleged misconduct and the loss of honour it caused to
the men of their families. In high class social circles, fear of sexual dishonour
led to the establishment of severe rules segregating women from men, and to
the marriage of girls at an early age, in order to keep their virginity intact for
intended husbands. As a logical consequence of this obsession with women's
bodies as depositories of men's honour, not even women's names could be
known to outsiders. As we have seen above, naming women or hinting at
their names and personalities in satirical poems became thus a powerful
weapon in the hands of enemies, who could bring scandal and shame on their
foes by these simple means.

Legal sexual relationships (nikah) discriminated between women, who
were only allowed to have sex with their husbands, and men, who had licit
access to both their wives and their female slaves. Religious regulations also
conditioned the nature of physical contact between women and men: hetero
sexual anal intercourse was severely condemned by moralists such as Ibn

al Hajj (d. 737/1336), and by Sunni schools of jurisprudence, with the exception
of the Malikis, who allowed it if the wife consented. 89 Men's sexual satisfaction
was a priority in a society where males dominated the social and sexual hierarchy, but women's needs in this respect were also acknowledged. One
of the reasons jurists and moralists disapproved of practising coitus interruptus
with one's wife was precisely the dissatisfaction it caused to women. The Andalusi polymath Ibn al Khatib (d. 776/1375), following a trend already present in the Prophetic tradition, advised men, in one of his medical treatises,
to take care of women's sexual desires and needs; in the early ninth/fifteenth
century another medical author, al Azraqi, specifically linked his encourage
ment of foreplay to a woman's sexual passion. 90 However, the aforemen tioned Ibn al Hajj bitterly reproached his Egyptian contemporaries for having
very unsatisfactory sexual relationships with their wives, who were approached without preparation or had to submit to anal intercourse. 91

89 Monroe, 'The striptease', pp. 116 17; J. A. Bellamy, 'Sex and society in Islamic popular
literature', in al Sayyid Marsot (ed.), Society and the sexes, p. 36; Lutfi, 'Manners and
customs', p. 107.

90 Marin, Mujeres en alAndalus, pp. 662 3; Berkey, 'Circumcision circumscribed', p. 32.

91 Lutfi, 'Manners and customs', p. 107.

376

Women, gender and sexuality

Female excision, practised in some parts of the Muslim world, as in Egypt, did
not contribute to women's sexual satisfaction either. 92

Legally, the most important illicit sexual act was zina\ a term describing
vaginal intercourse between a man and a woman who was not his wife or his
concubine. Any child born from an adulterous relationship was illegitimate. 93
The penalty for adulterers was death by stoning, although it was necessary to
prove the charges with four witnesses or by the confession of the guilty
parties. But in 911 / 1513 a famous Cairene case of adultery ended by the hanging
of the lovers, surprised in bed by the woman's husband. In this case the
penalty was the personal decision of the Mamluk sultan; the judges had
previously recommended forgiveness if the sinners repented. 94 Ottoman
imperial law slightly modified the Qur'anic inspired regulations, and in
tenth/ sixteenth century courts less than four witnesses were needed to
prove an adulterous relationship. 95

Crossing religious boundaries aggravated the transgression of sexual
regulations. Ibn 'Abdun, in sixth/twelfth century Seville, advised Muslim
women against entering churches populated, in his opinion, by libertine
and dissolute Christian priests. In 687/1288, in Damascus, a Christian man
who was drinking wine with a Muslim woman during Ramadan was con
demned to death; as stated above, prostitution and alcohol shared physical as
well as imagined premises, and the woman in this situation was probably a
prostitute. In Damascus, brothels (mawad? al zina 1) and taverns were con
tiguous. 96 Hiring women for prostitution was not exclusive to brothels, but
could be done in other urban spaces, such as jails for women, slave markets,
cemeteries etc.

Homoeroticism has been identified as an inherent characteristic of Muslim
societies; and the amount and quality of homoerotic classical Arabic poetry
could be offered as a proof for this assertion. A work by the philologist and
biographer al SafadI (d. 764/1363), Law 1 at al shaki, evokes a homoerotic love
affair, following the major themes in this literary tradition, such as gazing at

92 Berkey, 'Circumcision circumscribed'.

93 N.J. Coulson, 'Regulation of sexual behavior under traditional Islamic law', in al Sayyid
Marsot (ed.), Society and the sexes, p. 68; E. K. Rowson, 'The categorization of gender and
sexual irregularity in medieval Arabic vice lists', in Julia Epstein and Kristina Straub
(eds.), Body guards: The cultural polities of gender ambiguity (New York, 1991), p. 55.

94 C. F. Petry, 'Royal justice in Mamluk Cairo: Contrasting motives of two sultans', in
Saber religioso y poder politico en el Islam (Madrid, 1994), pp. 207 9.

95 Peirce, Morality tales, p. 133.

96 Marin, Mujeres en alAndalus, p. 666; Pouzet, Damas au Vlle/VIIIe siecle, pp. 321, 365.

377

the beautiful face of the beloved. 97 Love for handsome boys was, as in Greece,
part of the accepted cultural view in secular high class circles, and no shame
was involved in admiring good looking ephebes. Sex segregation left unmar
ried sexually active men with no alternative but to solicit sex from boys, their
own slave girls and prostitutes. In all these options men kept their sexual
superiority as penetrators of women and boys. On the other hand, and in
contrast to Christian views on the matter, to be sexually attracted by one's
own sex was not considered by Muslim thinkers as unnatural or abnormal.

Homosexual inclinations escaped condemnation, as long as homosexual acts
are not practised; in this case, sinners had to expect the penalty for zina\ 98

Socially, a man's reputation was not besmirched for being an active homo sexual, but a passive one was considered to be a pervert, and his inclination to
be penetrated a serious illness." But among certain groups, such as the Mamluk military caste or the Sufi communities, homoerotic liaisons and homosexual attachments were fairly common.™ The great Egyptian historian
al Maqrizi suggests that conjugal ties were weakened by the frequence of homosexuality among Mamluks, and that wives took to wearing men's clothing to attract their husbands. 101

While male homosexuality is well documented, lesbianism rarely attracted
the attention of Muslim authors, who approached this sexual activity with great reluctance with the exception of erotic literature, in which some vignettes on lesbians can be found, as in the Nuzhat al albab (The pleasure
of the hearts), the treatise written by al Tifashi. Lesbian sexual acts were of
course severely condemned, 102 but homoerotic attachment between women
did not threaten the genealogical capital of families, and they were usually
kept in the private domain of households. Thus lesbianism escaped, to some
extent, the social control of sexuality. Significantly, in the opinion of al Samaw'al ibn Yahya al Maghrib! (d. 570/1174), a Jew converted to Islam,
lesbianism was more frequent among elegant and cultivated women who could read and recite poetry. 103

97 L. A. Giffen, Theory of profane love among the Arabs (London and New York, 1972),
pp. 124 32. On the work by al Safadi see E. K. Rowson, 'Two homoerotic narratives
from Mamluk literature: al Safadi's Law'at al shaki and Ibn Daniyal's al Mutayyam', in
Wright and Rowson (eds.), Homoeroticism.

98 Monroe, 'The striptease', pp, 116 17; Rowson, 'The categorization of gender', p. 65.

99 Rowson, 'The categorization of gender', p. 64.

100 Schimmel, 'Eros'.

101 Cited by 'Abd ar Raziq, Lafemme au temps des mamlouks, p. 183.

102 G. H. A. Juynboll, 'Sihak', Eh, vol. IX, pp. 565 7.

103 Marin, Mujeres en al Andalus, p. 679.

378

Women, gender and sexuality

One of the main worries of moralists was to establish clear and impene
trable boundaries between women and men. The sexually ambiguous char
acter of the hermaphrodite and the effeminate (mukhannath) greatly disturbed
the ideal social order of a two sexed community, and lengthy juridical dis
cussions are preserved debating the place of the hermaphrodite in society. 104
But while hermaphroditism was a biological fact, transvestism was a personal
choice, and the mukhannath, in contrast to the hermaphrodite, found a place,
however despised, in society. Frequently associated with marginality, trans
vestites would work as actors and, more commonly, as pimps. 105

As we have seen, far from freely celebrating all kind of sexual pleasures,
medieval Islamic cultures were deeply concerned about the necessity to
control sex, to ensure the purity of genealogical descent and to prevent
disorder in societal norms. Apocalyptic traditions linked the upheaval of the
last times to the existence of powerful and assertive women, who would
behave in an immoral way; the spread of homosexuality is another sign of the
approach of the apocalypse. 10 Acknowledging, however, the importance of
sexual relationships in human life, Islam promoted marriage as the ideal

situation for Muslim men and women, and did not consider celibacy as a
religiously superior position. Social and religious control of sexuality was
not,
of course, total, and women and men developed their own individualities
in
ways that did not always conform to the orthodoxy.

104 P. Sanders, 'Gendering the ungendered body: Hermaphrodites in
medieval Islamic
law', in Keddie and Baron (eds.), Women in Middle Eastern history.

105 Y. Lev, 'Aspects of the Egyptian society in the Fatimid period', in U.
Vermeulen and
J. Van Steenbergen (eds.), Egypt and Syria in the Fatimid, Ayyubid and
Mamluk eras, 5
vols. (Leuven, 2001), vol. Ill, p. 9.

106 Saleh, 'The woman as a locus of apocalyptic anxiety', pp. 134 5.

379

PART III

LITERATURE

13

Arabic literature

JULIA BRAY

Formative cultures and identities

The pre-Islamic poet

Ask if you are uninformed about my people when the horses return from the

inflicting of wounds!
We halt in the [most] fearsome spot of every protected grazing ground and

mountain pass and no territory close to us can be ravaged,
On prancing mares and noble stallions, lean bellied, strongly built, with

prominent withers, brisk and energetic.
When we halt in the very heart of a tribe's territory it receives no respite from

fierce, constant warfare.
When war girds herself, we arise like full grown camels in the wide enclosure
On lean flanked, tight bellied [horses] that kick up dust on the tousled [braves],

fair of face. 1

This is how Bishr ibn Abi Khazim, who lived towards the end of the sixth century CE, describes his tribe and, by extension, himself. Arabic poetry as the
vehicle of heroic themes, one of its primary roles through all succeeding periods, was the invention of pre Islamic poets such as Bishr. It expressed the
ideals of tribal society to tribal audiences, but may also have reflected wider
political ambitions, boasting to the Byzantines and Sasanians of the fighting
qualities of the Arabs who skirmished with each other on their borders. 2 Verse
as early as that of Bishr is already both highly wrought and freighted with
ethical symbolism, and its conventional motifs are more than merely descrip
tive. Bishr' s syntax is abrupt, but it unfolds an argument: men are aggressive
physical beings; because they compete for resources, war is ceaseless; war pits

i Bishr ibn Abi Khazim, trans, in J. E. Montgomery, The vagaries of the qasidah: The tradition

and practice of early Arabic poetry, E.J. W. Gibb Memorial Trust (n.p., 1997), pp. 170 1.
2 Montgomery, Vagaries, pp. 217 18.

383

like against like and breeds virtue in both winners and worthy foes ('the tousled [braves], fair of face'); it is the tribe, the 'people', that makes the individual.

The pre Islamic and early Islamic poetry that Muslim scholars started collecting in the second/ eighth century from tribesmen, and sometimes restoring or brazenly inventing, was a remnant of what had once existed, but enough survives to show differences of manner and sensibility, of milieu
and of sophistication. 3 In spite of many lacunae, it increasingly seems possible
to identify thought systems and trace conceptual shifts in this earliest Arabic
literature. 4 But what the scholars who created the corpus strove to extract
from it was rather a timeless quintessence of Arabic linguistic purity, of heroic
Bedouinity and Arab virtues, and themes unique to the Arabs: a classical ideal.
This ideal, shaped by cultural competition with the conquered peoples of the
Islamic empire, became the key element in defining Arab culture as a pro gramme for the future. Yet few of the scholars who championed Arabic were
tribal Arabs, or even of Arab descent, and the same was true of the poets, patrons and educated people who chose an Arab or, more properly, Arabic

literate cultural identity during the first three or four centuries of Islam. The
great majority were mawall (sing, mawla), foreign converts.

The early Islamic bureaucrat

What were the cultural choices that could be made during this period, and
how free were individuals to make them? Just as eloquent of a sense of identity
derived from the group is the following passage, separated from Bishr by
the century or so that saw the coming of Islam, the Arab conquests and
the establishment of a dynastic caliphate. Abd al Hamid ibn Yahya al katib
('the Secretary', c. 66 132/685 750) was a high ranking mawla bureaucrat; he
served in Syria and then, for twenty years, with the governor of Azerbaijan
and Armenia, who became the last Umayyad caliph, Marwan II (r. 127 32/744
50). This is 'Abd al Hamid's picture of the ideal functionary:

A scribe and administrator (katib) should be lenient in due season and know
when to be firm, bold or reticent as appropriate. Probity, justice and equity
should be his preference . . . Your colleagues, who guard your back for you in
time of need, should be more to you than your own children and brothers . . .
When you work for a man, study his character, and once you have ascer
tained his good and bad points, use your subtlest ploys and most flattering

3 Ibid., p. 39.
4 Recent scholarship is discussed by Montgomery in ibid., passim.

Arabic literature

devices to influence him to do good according to his capacity and turn him
away from evil inclinations. A groom who knows his business will, as you are
aware, make a point of studying his beast's disposition. If it is over lively, he
will ride it without urging it on; if it places its feet wrongly, he will correct it;
he will not let it have its head if it is a bolter ... A katib, by virtue of his
knowledge of things and of men (adab), his noble calling, his subdety in
dealing with those with whom he has converse or argument and those whose
violence [satwa; the word applies both to a horse's refractoriness and to an
unprovoked attack] he perceives or apprehends, should be better able gently
to cajole a colleague [or: a superior] and set him straight than the rider of a
brute beast which cannot return an answer and knows not right from wrong. 5

The group addressed by 'Abd al Hamid in his al Risala ila al kuttab (Epistle
to the secretaries) is one whose way of life and view of itself seem the very
opposite of the Arab warrior's; most katibs were mawali, and it is assumed that
they carried on the culture of the old imperial bureaucracies with little change.
Since the reforms of c Abd al Malik, however, they had been required to write
in Arabic. In the same epistle 'Abd al Hamid urges his fellow scribes to learn
Arabic poetry; and by writing Arabic epistles he himself helped to found
Arabic prose literature. He tells scribes to learn non Arab as well as Arab
lore, and to study the Muslim religion: in other words, they are to make
themselves the bearers of all available cultural traditions. His aim is cultural
reciprocity, for his writings have two sets of recipients: mawla bureaucrats and
Arab rulers. His al Risala 'an Marwan ila ibnihi 'Abd Allah (Epistle to the crown
prince), composed at the request of Marwan II, is the first manifesto of the
duties of a Muslim ruler, and like the 'Epistle to the secretaries' recycles
Graeco Persian political wisdom. Was it directly informed by Aristotle's
pseudepigraphic advice to Alexander, as has been suggested?

'Abd al Hamid's literary world, like that of Bishr, promotes a group identity
in which the individual achieves the highest virtue by loyalty to his peers.
(Although he puts professional ties above those of family, in his own case the
two went together by marriage, as would often be the case with katibs in
centuries to come.) He and Bishr both still belong to the world of Late
Antiquity. The distance between them can be measured in terms of stylistic
contrast, in their images of horses and horsemanship. But both live in a world
of ever present danger; violence always threatens. Even the most admirable

5 A. Z. Safwat (ed.), Jamharat rasaHl al 'Arab ft 'usur al 'arabiyya al zahira, 4 vols. (Cairo,
1937), vol. II, pp. 456 8.

6 References in W. al Qadi, ''Abd al Hamid ibn Yahya al Katib', EAL, vol. I, pp. 13 14; W. al
Qadi, 'Salim Abu al 'Ala'', EAL, vol. II, pp. 681 2.

385

katibs could not guard against all forms of ill will, and 'Abd al Hamid died violently when the 'Abbasids ousted the Umayyads.

Cultural exchange and cultural nostalgia

Under the 'Abbasids cultural exchange intensified and its patrons multiplied.
For the most part it was a process of deliberate choice, not unconscious osmosis. Its agents were elite bureaucrats, courtiers and their proteges.
Contact with high politics was dangerous: where tribal poets had often died
fighting, many 'Abbasid poets and katibs died in the torture chamber.

An example is Ibn al Muqaffa', a katib whose career began in Umayyad service and continued into the reign of the second 'Abbasid caliph, al Mansur
(136 58/754 75), who had him executed in around 137/755. He was a translator
from Middle Persian of Iranian political history, of Graeco Persian, Iranian and
Indian wisdom literature, including the political animal fables Kalila wa Dimna,
and author of an 'Epistle on the entourage of the caliph' (Risala fi al sahaba)
which proposes radical solutions, never to be adopted, to the problems of establishing a stable and united 'Abbasid caliphate. Like 'Abd al Hamid, he is
thought to have been an early transmitter of Aristotelianism. 7 Admired as a
master stylist, he imported so many genres into Arabic as to be regarded as the
main founder of Arabic prose literature, yet he was a Persian and a late convert
to Islam, a paradox of the kind that underlies much of the new literature.

His contemporary the blind poet Bashshar ibn Burd (c. 95 167/714 84) also
started his career under Umayyad patronage, and ended it under that of the
caliph al Mahdi (r. 158 69/775 85), who imprisoned and murdered him. He
too was of Persian origin, and in some of his poems he boasted of this and
disparaged the Arabs an attitude stigmatised as shxCubiyya (ethnic particular
ism) or used Zoroastrian imagery, which smacked of diabolism to some of
his listeners. Nevertheless, he not only came to be regarded as the first truly
'modern' poet the moderns (muhdathun) were defined by their conscious
use of rhetorical figures and logical argumentation (badV) but his Arabic
linguistic purity was held to be comparable to that of the 'ancients' (qudama').
This was a deliberately vague term for pre Islamic poets, whose utterances
were, increasingly, held to be the spontaneous expression, in the language
of the Qur'an, of a virtuous, although pagan, lifestyle. In fact, the Arabic of
pre Islamic poetry was not identical with Qur'anic Arabic, and some

7 References in F. de Blois, 'Ibn al Muqaffa", EAL, vol. I, pp. 352 3.

8 See H. Kennedy, The court of the caliphs: The rise and fall of Islam's greatest dynasty (London,
2004), chap. 5, 'Poetry and power at the early Abbasid court', pp. 118 20.

Arabic literature

pre Islamic poets, as was well known, were Jews or Christians. But the bold
notion that, as Arabic was the tongue of the Qur'an and the Arabs the people
chosen to receive it, so pre Islamic Arabia as a whole must be morally trans
figured, had become necessary in order to enable Arabs politically dominant,
but a numerical and cultural minority to proclaim their possession of a culture as authoritative as that of the majority populations. The pre Islamic
Arabs' dearth of historical records also made their poetry and the lore surrounding it the crucial witness to an Arab historical identity.

So poetry became in many respects the most conservative Arabic literary form, in part in order to maintain continuity with a venerable past, but partly
too because in aristocratic Arab circles it kept and even increased the function
it had had since before Islam as a public weapon. A poet's praise (madih) or
ridicule (hijd') could still make or unmake his patron's reputation (it was imprudent hija' that caused Bashshar's downfall). Verse designed for ceremo
nial recitation on the occasion of a caliph's accession, for example, or of a victory continued to be cast broadly in the mould of the pre Islamic qasida
(multi thematic poem, often translated as 'ode'), and the three greatest names in 'Abbasid poetry are those of poets whose main output consisted of
ceremonial verse: Abu Tammam (c. 189 232/805 45); his pupil al Buhturi

(206 84/821 97), who both wrote poems to caliphs, viziers and other leading
statesmen; and al Mutanabbi (c. 303 54/915 65), who praised the glamorous
Hamdanid prince of Aleppo, Sayf al Dawla (r. 333 56/944 67), as the champion
of Islam against Byzantium before embarking on a career as an embittered
freelance. The diwans (collected works) of these three, 9 especially Abu
Tammam and al Mutanabbi, attracted commentaries as bulky as those of
the pre Islamic poets whose diction and imagery they echo, as al Mutanabbi
does those of Abu Tammam: if Abu Tammam is neoclassical, then al Mutanabbi is neo neoclassical. Abu Tammam reinforced his classical aura by
composing an anthology of Bedouin verse, al Hamasa (Valour), 10 which was at
least as widely admired as his own poetry: his readers found in it everything
they expected of the noble Arab of the desert, and indeed the pieces were artfully selected from antiquarian sources and tailored to this end. Abu Tammam's Bedouins have litde in common with the real Arab tribesmen of
his day, seldom encountered by most of his readers. He also trumpeted the
triumphs of Islam over heretics and rebels, and one of his most famous poems

9 Bibliographies in J. S. Meisami, 'Abu Tammam', EAL, vol. I, pp. 47 9; J. S. Meisami,
'al Buhturi', EAL, vol. I, pp. 161 2; J. S. Meisami, 'al Mutanabbf, EAL, vol. II, pp. 558 60.
10 Studied in detail in S. P. Stetkevych, Abu Tammam and the poetics of tfte 'Abbasid age
(Leiden, 1991), part 3.

387

The New Cambridge History of Islam

is his qasida celebrating al Mu'tasim's (r. 218 27/833 42) victory over the

Byzantines at Amorium in 223/838, which casts the caliph's soldiers of many races, some of them mercenaries and some slaves, and not all of them
Muslims in the role of the Prophet Muhammad's Arab holy warriors, and mocks the Christians as pagans." Yet Abu Tammam himself, it was said, was the son of a Syrian Christian innkeeper; and his verse, for all its Arab neoclassicism, was steeped in conceits derived from philosophy.

This yoking of opposites triggered a long running critical debate which bore fruit a century later, when poetic criticism (naqd al shi l r) moved out of the
salon into the study and became a substantial discipline. Al Amidi (d. 371/987),
whose al Muwazana bayna shi'r Abi Tammam wa al Buhturi (Weighing of the
poetry of Abu Tammam against that of al Buhturi) was a key work in this transition, put a new twist on what by this time were lapsed anti shu^ubi themes when, in an echo of the debate between Aristotelian logicians and Arabic grammarians about the structure of human thought, he pinpointed what he found disturbing about Abu Tammam's poetic thought: it was not language specific. Rather, Abu Tammam tries to impose universal logic on the
Arab system of poetic truth, which is destructive, because poetry, especially
Arabic poetry, is culture specific. This sophisticated analysis had its roots in
the ideal of Bedouin culture that Abu Tammam's ever popular Hamasa had
itself helped to promote, and unfolded against the political and social backdrop
of the Persian Buyid takeover of the 'Abbasid caliphate.

Thus the way in which an ethnic factor could stimulate cultural change could be a matter of individual attitude: it has been argued that for Bashshar
and other shu'ubis it was personal resentment of their inferiority as mawali that
spurred them to excel at Arabic. It could also be a matter of intellectual allegiance, as in the case of Abu Tammam's poetry and al Amidi's criticism.
But equally, specialised knowledge of languages and ideas could be made to
serve a public programme. At first, with [Abd al Hamid and Ibn al Muqaffa',
the foreign ideas brought into Arabic were those of a professional elite with a
pragmatic and high handed approach to cultural fusion. On the model of their
own experience, without condescending to argue their case, they present

fusion as something to be applied at once, at all levels of behaviour, for both moral and practical benefit. This is what [Abd al Hamid calls adab. Adab would become a central notion in Arabic culture, the link between

11 Bibliography of this much discussed poem in J. Bray, 'al Mu'tasim's "bridge of toil" and
Abu Tammam's Amorium qasida', in G. R. Hawting et al., (eds.), Studies in Islamic and
Middle Eastern texts and traditions in memory of Norman Calder, journal of Semitic Studies
Supplement 12 (Oxford, 2000).

Arabic literature

literature and living, a professional and social tool and at the same time an
imaginative ideal. It would weather political and social changes for centuries
to come. It has been called 'Islamic humanism' by some modern scholars, for
Greek thought often feeds into it directly or indirecdy, it frequently praises
man's rational capacity (c aql), and makes human experience the framework of
its discourse.

Shu^ubiyya was a shorter lived phenomenon. Its effects were out of propor
tion to its duration: it stimulated its opponents, thinkers who, like the shu'ubis
themselves, were usually non Arabs, but who favoured Arabic (rather than
Arab) particularism, to debate openly what the choice of an Arabic cultural
identity might imply, and to set their own examples of the directions they wished the new culture to take. From one end to the other of the Arabic speaking Islamic world, founding agendas were laid down in the third/ninth
and fourth/tenth centuries; some of the key works, by the easterners al Jahiz
and Ibn Qutayba and the Andalusian Ibn 'Abd Rabbih, will be touched upon shortly.

In the eastern Islamic world shu'ubiyya was deflected by the re
emergence
of Persian as a literary language in the fourth/tenth century. In al
Andalus it
makes its appearance when Arabic showed no sign of being displaced,
and
there is disagreement about its social and political significance. The sole
extant
Andalusian shu'ubl tract is the short 'Epistle' of Ibn Garcia /Gharsiya, a
Muslim
of Basque extraction, composed in the second half of the fifth/ eleventh
century, which complains of the arrogance of privileged Arab settlers. Of
the several refutations to which it gave rise, that of Abu Yahya ibn
Mas'ada,
dating from perhaps a century later, contains one of the most lyrical
affirma
tions of the virtue of the pre Islamic Arabs to be found in either eastern
or
western Arabic literature. 12.

Patronage and loyalties

Alignments of identification can seem arbitrary when they are caught up
in
polemic. The secretaries' loyalty to the 'Abbasid regime was never in
doubt,
but they became targets of anti shu c ubiyya because of their harping on
Persian
and Hellenistic wisdom and on their own privileged position as
intermediaries
between the ruler and the ruled, and as such as agents of divine
providence.
This proved extremely annoying to other mawali equally loyal to the
'Abbasids but employed by them in other capacities, especially if they
were
committed, as katibs rarely were, to serious religious enquiry. So, in his

12 S. Enderwitz, 'al Shu'ubiyya'. Eh, vol. IX, pp. 513 16.

irritation with the scribes, Ibn Qutayba 13 the qddx and hadiih scholar (213 76/
828 89), author, among other works, of al Ma'arif (General knowledge) and
c Uyun al akhbar (The [anthology of] choicest narratives (Arab and foreign)) and
of a handbook for bureaucrats, Adab al katib (The conduct of the scribe), three
of the founding texts of second generation 'Abbasid adab, geared to a wide
middlebrow readership, for all his mistrust of his nimble and ironical prede
cessor, aljahiz (c. 160 255/776 868), sometimes seems to be saying the same as
aljahiz, 14 whose huge Kitab albayan waaltabyin (Book of eloquence and exposition) and Kitab al hayawan (Book of living creatures) are cornerstones
of Mu'tazilite rationalism and of adab aimed at an intellectual elite. Aljahiz
mocks the scribes' glib cosmopolitanism, Ibn Qutayba their glib rationalism 15
both signs of their lack of understanding of the Arab intellectual foundations of
Islam, of which aljahiz and Ibn Qutayba were self appointed champions. Yet
aljahiz, occasional propagandist of the caliph and friend to very highly placed
statesmen, and Ibn Qutayba, a legal functionary with powerful protectors,
were allies of the elite and therefore of its supporting bureaucracy, and both
were ready to absorb into their own intellectual systems whatever foreign
elements they found congenial: both, in fact, accepted the scribal synthesis,
along with the notion of adab as a pragmatic, meliorist broadening of horizons.

Not dissimilarly, court poets occupied debatable ground. If Bashshar was
not the only poet to meet a gruesome end, after taunting his patrons in a bid to
raise his own standing, nor was he the last to flirt in verse with naughtiness
or even heresy in order to thrill these same patrons: the complicity between
poets and patrons was necessarily a game of risk. The stakes included mon
etary reward, sometimes in the form of an administrative sinecure: Abu

Tammam died as sahib al band (postmaster and intelligencer) of Mosul.
Fame for the poet was inextricable from image building for the patron, but
there is no simple formula for calculating the exchange of benefits. Patrons
could not make poets write to a programme, and since many poets did not
wish to discard the moral authority that was a traditional part of their role,
patrons and proteges rarely made wholly common cause. Exceptional was the
ceremonial that the Isma'ili Fatimids used in their new capital, Cairo; its
cosmological symbolism was repeated in their architecture, their public
appearances and also in the poetry written for them, as if it were a natural

13 Bibliography of editions, translations and studies, in J. E. Lowry, 'Ibn
Qutaybah',
DLB:ALC.

14 Bibliography of editions, translations and studies in J. E. Montgomery,
'aljahiz',
DLB:ALC.

15 References in Enderwitz, 'al Shu'ubiyya'.

390

Arabic literature

emanation of the sacred caliphs, though of course it was the creation of the
teams of thinkers and artists in their service, just like the themes of dynastic
and regnal propaganda devised by poets for the Umayyads and 'Abbasids. 1
But poets chose their patrons, not the other way about. Thus the political
rivalries of the Fatimids' final years exposed the historian and court poet

'Umara al Yamani (515 69/1121 74) to conflicts of loyalty, which are reflected
both in his poetry and in his autobiography, al Nukat al c asriyya fi akhbar
al wuzara' al misriyya (Tales of our times: particulars of Egypt's viziers).
When Saladin seized power (567/1171) 'Umara courted the new order, but
did not show enough enthusiasm, and Saladin had him strangled. 17

Female literary identities

Choices of alignment were subject to varied pressures and constraints.
Political positioning or even personal likes and dislikes was one factor,
but not always the most important: the legal capacity of an individual was the
starting point. Bashshar had been free, legally, to choose his own, contentious
identity, but many others were not, because they were slaves who had a
limited legal scope and whose original identity had been deleted and replaced
with an Arab one. The group of the greatest social and literary significance to
whom this applies was female; its period of greatest importance was the first
two 'Abbasid centuries.

The female slave musicians (qayna, pi. qiyan or jariya, pl.jawari) of the early
'Abbasid court were the successors of the slaves skilled in Persian or Byzantine
music who had been part of the luxury culture of the pre Islamic Arabs, either
as court musicians to the Ghassanid and Lakhmid phylarchs or as performers
in taverns. They are mentioned in early poetry, and the careers of the most
famous are sketched in the Kitab al aghani (Book of songs) of Abu al Faraj
al Isfahan! (284 c. 363/ 897 c. 972). Pre Islamic qiyan set various kinds of male
tribal poetry to music, but were not themselves poets, 1 and their role
contrasts with that of free, female tribal poets, who composed elegies
(maraihT) for slain male relatives. In early Islamic times qiyan went on to
play a major part, for which the Kitab al aghani is again our authority, in the
flowering in Medina and Mecca of a feminised Arabic culture which followed

16 Overview in J. S. Meisami, 'Madih, madly', EAL, vol. II, pp. 482 4.

17 P. Smoor, ''Umara's poetical views of Shawar, Dirgham, Shirkuh and Salah al Din as
viziers of the Fatimid caliphs', in F. Daftary and J. W. Meri (eds.), Culture and memory in
medieval Islam: Essays in honour ofWilferd Madelung (London and New York, 2003).

18 The standard study remains N. D. al Asad, al Qiyan wa al ghina' fi al 'asraljdhili, 3rdedn
(Beirut, 1988 [i960]).

the Arab conquests, when cash and slaves flowed into the Peninsula and a
new, leisured Arab aristocracy set about the pursuit of pleasure. Those
inhabitants of the Hijaz who had not gone off to fight seem to have devoted
themselves at this time either, according to legal sources, to laying the
foundations of Islamic law or, according to adab works such as the Kitab
al aghani, to developing new kinds of love poetry. These were typified, on
the one hand, by the witty dialogues and love letters of the aristocratic 'Umar
ibn Abi Rabi'a (23 93 or 103/644 712 or 721) and his imitators, who wooed
aristocratic ladies, and, on the other, by the melancholy 'Udhri manner
(named after the tribe of 'Udhra), which favoured chastity, despair and
faithfulness unto death between pairs of Bedouin lovers, of whom the arche
typal couple, Majnun ('the madman') and Layla, 19 may have been entirely
legendary. (Later, the foul mouthed Bashshar was famous for his love poetry
in this 'courtly' tradition.) Musical and literary salons (majlis, pi. majalis)
flourished, often presided over by women, either slave musicians or Arab

aristocrats inviting the poetic praises of their admirers. The supporting role in
this feminised culture of 'effeminate' men (mukhannathuri) is stressed in the
anecdotal literature. 20 'Abbasid depictions of this bohemian interlude like to
show the merry makers and 'effeminates' getting the better of attempts by the
nascent legalists to shut them down, and this must have been more than a
fictional victory, since Arabia retained its reputation for musical training and
was one of the sources that supplied women slave musicians to the early
'Abbasid court, where some became caliphal concubines, with a marked effect
on court politics and on the dynasty's reproductive strategies. 21

It appears that 'Abbasid qiyan/jawari had no memory of the cultures to
which they or their parents had belonged before enslavement. Instead, they
had an encyclopaedic knowledge of Arabic poetry, which enabled them to
catch allusions, cap quotations and improvise in verse, and of course to set
poetry to music, and generally match or exceed the learning and intelligence
of their clientele. (The learned Tawaddud of the Thousand and one nights is
easily recognisable as an 'Abbasid jariya.) The jariya, therefore, was the most
flattering of cultural trophies, having no culture of her own but embodying
that of her masters and being at the same time a luxury sexual commodity,
much sought after in well to do circles as well as in aristocratic families and at
court. In both romantic and satirical writing 'Abbasid jawari are treated as if

19 Their legend was greatly developed in Persian literature and painting.

20 See E. R. Rowson, 'The effeminates of early Medina', JAOS, in (1991).

21 See Kennedy, The court of the caliphs, chap. 7, 'The harem'.

392

Arabic literature

they were the agents of a significant feminisation of elite society. 22. This is
probably more of a literary theme than a reality; but in the course of the
fourth/tenth century their audience seems to have widened, and they pop
ularised notions of courtliness to a cross section of the urban population. A
sequence of vignettes of singers in Baghdad dating from the 360s /970s and
retailed by al Tawhidi (on whom see pp. 398, 401 below) suggests that
important shifts were taking place. Qiyan who sang to the public were not
only numbered in hundreds, but a sizeable proportion of them were free
women; 'boys [like] moons' were beginning to equal them in popularity; and
above all, they were much admired by several leading Sufis. 23 The poetry they
sang to them was ordinary love poetry (ghazal), but Sufis, themselves an
emergent group on the larger social scene, would soon start to quote ghazal
and secular love theory as a system of metaphor for divine love, before
starting to write their own, spiritual verse, which continued to use its con
ventions. The women and boy singers of fourth /tenth century Baghdad seem
to have opened the way to the fusion effected by Sufism between adab, a
delicacy of human feeling forged in elite circles, and a religious sensibility
which drew on traditionalist opposition to elite intellectual purism in matters
of belief. Al Sarraj's (c. 417 500/1026 1106) MasarF al c ushshaq (Calamities of
lovers) is a forerunner of these trends, whose development would be pursued
over several centuries.

A significant part of the defining work of 'Abbasid adab, the Kitab
al agharii, 24 is devoted to the lives and compositions of the great jawari up
until the second half of the third /ninth century. Abu al Faraj al Isfahani also

collected the poetry of 'Abbasid slave poetesses in a separate book, al Ima 1
al shawaHr (Slavewomen poets). The women's artistic integrity and sense of
professional purpose come through clearly in his biographies, which highlight
the splendours but also give glimpses of the miseries of their situation.
Original material with similar qualities is found in the Kitab al diyarat (Book
of monasteries) of al Shabushti (d. c. 399/1008; see pp. 396, 397 below). Earlier,
the greed and heartlessness of qiyan in their role of courtesans had been

22 See J. Bray, 'Men, women and slaves in Abbasid society', in L. Brubaker and J. M. H. Smith
(eds.), Gender in the early medieval world: East and West, 300 900 (Cambridge, 2004).

23 Near identical passages in al Tawbldi, al Imtd' wa al mu'anasa, ed. A. Amln and
A. al Zayn, 2nd edn, 3 vols, in 1 (Cairo, 1953), vol. II, pp. 165 83 and al Tawhidi (attrib.),
al Risala al Baghdddiyya, ed. 'A. al Shalji (Beirut, 1400/1980), pp. 244 67.

24 Editions and bibliography in H. Kilpatrick, Making the Great book of songs: Compilation
and the author's craft in Abu I Faraj al Isbahani's Kitab al aghani (London and New York,
2003).

satirised by al Jahiz in his mischievous Risalat al qiyan (Epistle on singing girls)
and by al Washsha' (d. 325/937) in chapter 20 of his Kitab al muwashsha (Book

of brocade), a pessimistic meditation on modern love coupled with a guide to
fashionable clothes and manners (zarf). To al Tanukhi (327 84/939 94), on the
contrary, in chapter 13 of his al Faraj ba'd al shidda (Deliverance from evil),
jawari are romantic and usually self sacrificing heroines who save their lovers
from their own foolishness and are rewarded with their lifelong devotion, or
even marriage. They are ubiquitous in the literature of the period, and
continue to fascinate later writers, who retell the classic stories about them.
But the Andalusian Ibn Hazm (384 456/994 1064), genealogist, jurist and
heresiographer, but also theorist of love and champion of the home grown
culture of Islamic Spain, does not retell old stories in his Tawq al hamama (Ring
of the dove). Instead, he shows slave musicians simply as women whom he or
his friends had known and loved in the family quarters of their own aristo
cratic households. His account of his unconsummated adolescent affair with
one such girl, and of the quiet, random unhappiness of her subsequent fate,
displays an understanding of how female destinies are plotted against the
different rhythm of male lives comparable to that of his Japanese contempo
rary Murasaki.

No chronicles of qiyan of later periods have come to light, although the
profession did not disappear. A few passages by the leading local songwriter of
his day, Ibn al Tahhan, afford a glimpse of female and male musicians at work
in Fatimid Egypt in the 1050s. 25 For al Andalus, and more particularly Seville,
some contemporary detail of the training, licensing and sale of women slave
musicians can be gleaned from a treatise on music by Ahmad ibn Yusuf
al Tif ashi (580 651/1184 1253). 2 By this time al Andalus was exporting to
eager audiences in the east its music, and the home grown lyrical poetic
genres that went with it, the multirhymed, stanzaic muwashshah and the
vernacular Arabic zajal. Before this, for the first century and a half of its
existence, Muslim Spain had looked to the east for its high culture, and it was
musicians from the east, including women slaves, who had helped implant, in

a region that felt itself to be intellectually marginal and was largely ignored by
easterners, adab, love poetry and the makings of the sentimental code that Ibn
Hazm sets out in the Tawq al hamama.

25 Quoted in al Asad, al Qiyan, pp. 265 7.

26 D. Reynolds, 'Music', in M. R. Menocal et al. (eds.), The Cambridge history of Arabic
literature, vol. V: The literature of al Andalus (Cambridge, 2000), pp. 65 7, 70 1; C. Pellat,
'Kayna', Eh, vol. IV, pp. 820 4.

394

Arabic literature

The role of marginal figures

Divorced from their own backgrounds, brought up as Muslims, and often
absorbed into their owners' families as concubine mothers, 'Abbasid jawari
contrast with the dynasties of non Muslim men of learning of the same period
who for several generations kept their own religion and, still more distinc
tively, made a family business of their knowledge of foreign sciences
medicine, philosophy and mathematics and the foreign languages that
were the key to them. Despite their small numbers, their effect on Arabic
culture was pervasive. By the fourth /tenth century the new terminology and
ways of thinking that the originally elite translation movement introduced had
not only enriched educated vocabulary but forced all literate and thinking
Muslims to re examine their beliefs about the place of rationality ('aql) in
different systems of authority, human and divine.

Medicine in particular, being in wide demand, made a deep impression in

educated circles, and figures prominently in both prose and poetic aiab.
27

Physicians, who were also courtiers and part of the dramatis personae of the
caliph's entourage, impressed themselves on the 'Abbasid imaginations in a
similar way to jawari. The medical historian Ibn Abi Usaybi'a (c. 590 668/
1194 1270), who belonged to a dynasty of Muslim physicians in service under
the Ayyubids and Mamluks, quotes vivid vignettes of the Nestorian Bakhtishu 1
(or Bukhtishu') family of Baghdad, for example a scene where Bukhtishu 1 ibn
Jibra'il (the fourth of eight generations of court physicians) coaxes the little
prince al Mu'tazz, whose lack of appetite is causing his father, the caliph
al Mutawakkil (232 47/847 61), great anxiety, to eat two apples just for
me' and drink some syrup just for me' by bribing him with his beautiful
coat, which the prince has been fingering longingly. 1 The al Sabi' family were
pagans from Harran in northern Syria; eleven generations of them have been
counted, the last member dying in 619/1222. The earlier generations were
scientists, mathematicians, translators and physicians. Several of them went
on to write chronicles of the 'Abbasid caliphate; that of the physician Thabit
ibn Sinan ibn Thabit ibn Qurra (d. 363/973 4) is quoted by later historians
notably the moral philosopher Miskawayh (c. 320 421/932 1030) and Ibn Abi
Usaybi'a for its dramatic personal accounts of events such as the fall and

27 J. Bray, 'The physical world and the writer's eye: al Tanukhi and medicine', in J. Bray
(ed.), Writing and representation in medieval Islam: Muslim horizons (London and
New York, 2006).

28 Ibn Abi Usaybi'a, 'Uyun al anba' fi tabaqat al atibbd', ed. N. Rida (Beirut, n.d.[i965]),
p. 206.

torture of the vizier Ibn Muqla, a fine adib but a foolish politician. Two other
members of the al Sabi 1 family were distinguished katibs in the service of the
Buyids of Baghdad: Ibrahim ibn Hilal (313 84/925 94), famous for his epistles
in rhymed prose (saf), and his grandson, Hilal ibn al Muhassin (359 448/969
1056), the first member of the family to convert to Islam, who composed an
elegiac account of 'The rules and regulations of the Abbasid court' (Rusum dar
al khilafa) as it had been before the advent of the Buyids. An example of how,
as time went on, successive pasts assumed classical status for readers of Arabic,
its title is a pun on the opening motif of the classical qasida, the 'traces of the
abandoned encampment' (rusum dar) of the poet's beloved. 29

When not at court, the Bukhtishu's were active in Nestorian ecclesiastical
politics. 30 But in the Arabic literary landscape Christians do not appear in such
humdrum roles. Rather, they provide local colour and opportunities for
escapism, for example as innkeepers in the wine poems (khamriyyat) of Abu
Nuwas (c. 140 98/755 813) a role in which Jews and Zoroastrians sometimes
appear too and as objects of homosexual desire, notably altar boys (with a
change of decor, young Turkish slave boys may also fill the role of love
objects). 31 Monasteries in the neighbourhood of cities, which sold wine in the
setting of orchards and gardens, are the scene of picnics, drinking parties and
amorous encounters. A whole literary genre arose out of these practices, of
which only the incomplete Kitab al diyarat of al Shabushti remains. He was an

Egyptian in the service of the Fatimid caliph al 'Aziz (r. 365 86/975 96),
but
although most of the convents he describes are in Iraq and Syria, and the
poems and literary anecdotes quoted mainly concern caliphs, aristocrats,
courtiers and singing women of the great 'Abbasid century, it is clear
that
townspeople still went on pleasure outings to monasteries in his own day.

Monasteries also served as madhouses (the commonest term is the
Persian
(hT)maristan); these too were the object of outings, and so became the
back
drop to another, long lasting literary theme, that of the wise madman,
who is
usually either a mystic out of tune with the world or a lover deranged by
separation from the beloved, itself a metaphor for the mystic's condition.
Al Sarraj's Masaii' al ^ushshaq is an early witness to this theme.

The literary stereotyping of the picturesque non Muslim and of the alien
ated Muslim can be seen as approaches to connected though not
identical

29 Personal communication from J. S. Meisami.

30 R. Le Coz, Les medecins nestoriens au moyen age: Les maitres des
Arabes (Paris, 2004), chaps.
6 and 12.

31 See T. Bauer, Liehe und Liebesdichtung in der arabischen Welt des 9.
und 10. Jahrhunderts
(Wiesbaden, 1998) for a comprehensive thematic survey of motifs.

396

Arabic literature

problems. Orthodoxy and heresy, hanging sometimes on hair's breadth
dis
tinctions, recurrently divided the Muslim community in controversy or

worse, and it must sometimes have seemed, in a happy literary solution seldom achieved in life, that only the simplicity of the madman could reconcile
dogmatic differences. Parts of the 'UqaW al majanln (Wise madmen) of al Nisaburi (d. 406/1015), the first surviving work on the theme, seem to suggest as much.

If the heretic within the community posed one sort of problem, the unbeliever without posed another. In societies where, until probably the beginning of the fifth/ eleventh century, the majority populations were non
Muslim, and in a culture and literature that owed much to non Muslims and
non Arabs, the question of who was an insider and who an outsider was an
uneasy one, and remained so for a long time. Thus the classic pre Islamic and
early Islamic wine poets had been Christians: 'Adi ibn Zayd (d. c. 600), credited
with inventing the free standing wine song, and al A'sha Maymun (d. c. 7/629)
and al Akhtal (c. 20 92/640 710), composers of great qasidas.^ But in the khamriyyat of Abu Nuwas and the diyarat poets Christians no longer spoke
for themselves, but were reduced to erotic props. The wine song had been
simultaneously appropriated and made transgressive by Muslim poets, and
would be made doubly so when Sufis such as Ibn al Farid (d. 632/1235) adopted
khamriyya along with ghazal as ways of conveying mystical experience. Yet,
despite being pushed to the margins of literary vision, Christians and other
outsiders continued to colonise Muslim culture, and today's outsider was often tomorrow's fellow Muslim, like Sa'id ibn Makhlad, one of al Shabushti's
heroes, who in around 265/878 converted to Islam in order to accept high office, while his brother 'Abdun remained a monk at Dayr Qunna. 33 Monasteries long remained a training ground for katibs, and katibs were often also adibs. 34 But the process by which monastery trained Christians
became part of the Muslim literary mainstream is not yet understood; nor are the reasons why, outside religious genres, Christian Arabic culture found
literary expression only in Muslim formats. The most striking example is Da'wat al atibba 1 (The physicians' dinner party) of the Nestorian physician, and

later monk, Ibn Butlan (d. 458/1066). It is a comic masterpiece which echoes

32 See references in P. F. Kennedy, Tfie wine song in classical Arabic poetry: Abu Nuwas and
the literary tradition (Oxford, 1997), pp. 5 6.

33 Al Shabushti, Kitab al diyarat, ed. G. 'Awwad, 3rd edn (Beirut, 1986), pp. 270 3.

34 H. Kilpatrick, 'Monasteries through Muslim eyes: The diyarat books', in D. Thomas
(ed.), Christians at tke heart of Islamic rule: Church life and scholarship in 'Abbasid Iraq
(Leiden and Boston, 2003), p. 36.

397

The New Cambridge History of Islam

the Deipnosophists of Athenaeus but is in the vanguard of mid Abbasid experimental prose: a picaresque narrative full of intertextual parody, which
has been bracketed with the maqatnat (see pp. 409 10 below). A 'Priests' dinner
party' (Da'wat al qusus) with similar characteristics is also attributed to him.
Ibn Butlan's other writings are in the fields of medical controversy and Christian theology; 35 we cannot reconstruct how he made the jump from
these kinds of writings to fashionable literary adab.

The eloquent madman is an extreme reminder of split identities. He is not
merely a fictional symbol; in the guise of the eccentric loner, at odds with society, he is also the biographical template of a number of major authors. For
uneasy or uneasily perceived identities underlie much Arabic literary produc

tion, despite the apparent consensuality of its formats and much of its subject
matter (see pp. 400, 402 9 below). Unease could arise from the antagonism felt
by those who had to make their own way in the world towards those who had
family and social advantages, such as the essayist Abu Hayyan al Tawhldi
(c. 315 411/927 1023), who was bitterly jealous of the easy praise (as he saw it)
won by the Buyid vizier al Sahib Ibn 'Abbad (326 85/938 95), a scholar and
brilliant patron of letters, and full of the aristocratic airs that came from
belonging to an Iranian katib family. Al Tawhidi punished him for failing
to recognise his own genius by lampooning him in Akhlaq al wazirayn
(The characters of the two viziers). 36

Equally, antagonism could be felt by haves towards have nots. (Ibn) al Qifu
(568 646/1172 1248), member of a Syro Egyptian katib dynasty, the languidly
omnicompetent minister of the Ayyubid princes of Aleppo, who professed
to scorn office routine and leave his beloved library only in emergencies,
was idolised by Yaqut (575 626/1179 1229), a self taught former slave of
Byzantine birth and the greatest Arabic literary biographer of his age.
Al Qifti helped Yaqut when he arrived penniless in Aleppo after fleeing from
the Mongols, who had overtaken him on his commercial cum scholarly travels
in the east; in return, Yaqut memorialised him in his own lifetime in a biography
constructed from his own, surprisingly candid, family reminiscences and from
his official epistles and praise poems, which are full of interesting historical detail
and up to date literary devices. Yaqut chose his materials well: they are difficult
but rewarding to read, and give a strong impression of al Qiffi's geniality and

35 References and bibliography in P. F. Kennedy, 'The maqamat as a nexus of interests:
Reflections on Abdelfattah Kilito's Les seances', in Bray (ed.), Writing and representation,
pp. 171 8, and Le Coz, Les medecins nestoriens, pp. 200 2, 325.

36 See J. L. Kraemer, Humanism in tfie renaissance of Islam: The cultural revival during the

Buyid age (Leiden, 1986), chap. 3, 'Profiles: scholars, patrons, and potentates'.

charm. 37 In one of only three works to survive from his vast and varied ceuvre,
the rather sloppily constructed biographical dictionary, Inbah al ruwat c ala anbah
al nuhat (Notable grammarians brought to the attention of transmitters [of the
subject]), whose shortcomings he blames on the inconsiderate death of a
collaborator, al Qiffl repays Yaqut's gratitude by sneering at him as a paid
copyist, trader, ex slave and autodidact. Indeed, he belitdes most of his con
temporaries, not in the fashionable circumlocutory saf of which Yaqut's portrait
shows him to have been a master, but in brutally unadorned prose; his anger is
what makes him (like al Tawhidi) so readable.

Yaqut's Irshad al arib ila ma'rifat al adxb/NhCjam al udaba' (Guidance for the
discerning in recognising men of adab or Dictionary of men of adab) is
infinitely more scholarly and remains a standard reference work, although
its literary genius is largely overlooked. Wherever possible Yaqut quotes his
contemporaries' own words and works, or, in the case of men of letters of
earlier centuries, the testimony of writers who knew them. Yet each bio
bibliographical entry is shaped with great art, both as an individual portrait
and as an element in Yaqut's argument about what adab is. As depicted by
Yaqut, with their defiant virtuosity and provocative behaviour towards prin
ces and aristocrats, several of his contemporaries, outsiders like himself, recall

early shu'ubis; examples are the two eccentrics, Abu Nizar al Hasan ibn Safi,
prince of grammarians' (who came of slave parentage), and the aged 'Sniffy'
(Shumaym, nickname of c Ali ibn al Hasan ibn c Antar of Hilla). Yaqut makes
fun of their vanity but sees something heroic in their absurdity. Although they
are misfits, in their independence and love of literature they are true adibs, and
in the pages of this encyclopaedia composed by a misfit they take their place as
equal heirs in a great tradition. 38

The greatest outsider of all, the philosopher poet and prose writer Abu
al 'Ala' al Ma'am (363 449/973 1058), blind, celibate, a vegetarian and a rec
luse in his home town of Ma'arrat al Nu'man in Syria, who described himself
as a captive of his infirmity and solitude, his soul a prisoner in his body, was
too heterodox to meet with the approval of Yaqut, who also hints that his
isolation was relative since he had an extensive, well placed and highly literate
family which did not neglect him. He nevertheless devotes one of his longest

37 Yaqut, Irshad al arib ila ma'rifat al adib, ed. I. 'Abbas, 7 vols. (Beirut, 1993), vol. V,
pp. 2022 36.

38 Translations in J. Bray, 'Yaqut's interviewing technique: "Sniffy"', in C. F. Robinson
(ed.), Texts, documents and artefacts: Islamic studies in honour ofD. S. Richards (Leiden and
Boston, 2003).

399

biographical entries to him, quoting a number of his epistles. 39 Al Ma'arri
himself, in spite of ostentatiously shunning the world, felt fully part of the
fellowship of adab past and present, receiving disciples and employing some of
his extraordinary talents in writing commentaries on the poetry of Abu
Tammam, al Buhturi and al Mutanabbi. 40

A sense of belonging: the evolving sociology of adab

Who were the founders and propagators of literary ideals that could com
mand loyalty across wounding divides and inspire a sense of belonging? The
values of adab, whether moral or aesthetic, came to be so widely shared with
the passing of time as to appear almost a set of natural features of the human
landscape. The Egyptian al Nuwayri (667 732/1279 1332), a senior civil servant
for the first part of his career, prefaces the twenty odd volumes of history
which form the bulk of his Nihayat al arabfifunun al adab (The heart's desire
concerning the kinds of adab) with four books of cosmology and natural
science, at the centre of which is the section on man, his institutions and
adab. Adab thus forms a hinge between the structure of the universe and the
ways in which man has played out his destiny; or, in another perspective,
cosmology is the warp and history the weft of adab. Al Ibshihi's (790 c. 850/
1388 c. 1446) alMustatraffi kuRfann mustazraf (The extreme of every kind of
elegance), also from Mamluk Egypt, is far less stately: 'elegance' is found in
vernacular proverbs, including 'women's proverbs', and in poetry both con
temporary and colloquial (chapter 72). Chapters on adab, bracketed with piety,
preface the whole; the topics of subsequent chapters, such as sultan (rulership),
are those of classical adab monographs or anthologies, and their contents are
well worn. This is familiar and comforting territory for al Ibshihi's readers, who
cannot have been intellectuals; the little encyclopaedia guides them pleasantly
through the ages of man and his activities to holy dying and the grave.

Yet the base of adab its intellectual and no less its social base had
originally been narrow. Under the early 'Abbasids writers seem to have
depended on intermittent patronage or on regular employment in govern
ment: katibs were often adxbs, and so too were the court companions
(nadim,
pi. nudamcC or jails, pi. julasa') whose job was to help a ruler or grandee
relax
after the day's business. Princely recreation included drinking and
joking,
but was on the whole an intellectually strenuous and strictly organised
busi
ness, according to the testimony of al Suli (d. c. 335/946), a scholar
whose

39 Yaqut, Irshad, vol. I, pp. 295 356.
40 G.J. H. van Gelder, 'Abu al 'Ala' al Ma'am, EAL, vol. I, pp. 24 5.

400

Arabic literature

works include collections of biographical anecdotes about al Buhturi
(Akhbar
al Buhturi) and Abu Tammam (Akhbar Abi Tammam) and an edition of
the
latter's diwan, and who served three caliphs as one of a team of no
longer very
sprightly julasa\ His memoirs of the reigns of al Radi (322 9/934 40) and
al Muttaqi (329 33/940 4) convey vividly the incongruous decorum of
literary
soirees conducted against a backdrop of fear of deposition or murder. 41

Despite the fact that almost anyone with pretensions to learning in any
field
also dabbled in adab (as they usually also did in hadith), it does not seem
to
have been common for serious experts in adab (unlike hadith experts) to
support themselves by trade. One of the first to do so was the Baghdad
bookseller Ibn Abi Tahir Tayfur (d. 280/893); the cheapness of paper and
an

expanding reading public afforded him a new economic opening. At the end of
the next century Ibn al Nadim, the author of al Fihrist (The index), a guide to
contemporary books, authors and fields of human knowledge, was also a
Baghdad bookseller. He appears to have been well connected and self assured.
Nevertheless, because of its associations with court culture, a certain snobbery
clung to adab, unlike religious learning, and made self supporting adibs
socially vulnerable: Ibn al Nadim's contemporary al Tawhidi smarted at hav
ing to earn his living as a copyist, and Yaqut met with scorn as well as respect
for combining bibliophilia with bookselling.

Adihs as spectators of power

The katibs and court companions who were more typical bearers of adab than
such independent figures as Ibn Abi Tahir Tayfur were of varied origins.
Thanks to the ubiquitous passion for poetry and music, members of great
families, even descendants of caliphs, could become court entertainers if their
fortunes dwindled. The profession tended to run in families. A number of
nadim. clans are prominent over several generations as intimate observers of
the caliphs and transmitters of court literature: the al Mawsilis, Ibn Hamduns,
Ibn al Munajjims and al Yazidis. It is in part from nadims that the great writers
of the third/ninth and fourth/tenth centuries, whether or not they themselves
served at court, derived the vivid sense of personality, of the commanding
gesture, the fateful choice, of splendour and pity, and sometimes comedy, that
they attach to the great Umayyad and 'Abbasid caliphs, their consorts, lovers
and ministers: images that were repeated in chronicles and literary compila
tions for centuries to come.

41 al Suh, Akhbar al Radt wa al Muttaqi, ed. J. Heyworth Dunne (Cairo, 1935), pp. 8 2.0.

The New Cambridge History of Islam

This vision of Muslim sovereignty was to play the same role as pre Islamic
poetry in forging a lasting cultural bond. Its images passed into popular
literature and folklore via the Thousand and one nights and the anthologies
of such authors as the Egyptians al Qalyubi (d. 1069/ 1659) and al Atlidi (or
al Itlidi, d. c. 1100/ 1689); but well before this, almost within their own life
times, the imagination of great scholars had coined for the thoughtful reader
potent images of rulers as flawed vessels of history. A centrepiece of al
Mas'udts (c. 283 345/896 956) Muruj aldhahab (Meadows of gold) is the
tragi comedy of the destinies of the sons of Harun al Rashid (d. 193/809),
shot through, in his episodic telling of the tale, with ironic omens and leitmotifs,
while the last section of Miskawayh's Tajarib al umam (Experiences of the
nations), a sustained narrative all the more suspenseful for the complexity of
the threads it twists together, plots the malice, imbecility, futility and pity of
the scramble for power triggered by the decay of the c Abbasid caliphate.
Some dynasties produced exceptional literary talents: many Abbasids; the
Hamdanid poet Abu Firas (320 57/932 68), cousin of Sayf al Dawla; the
Fatimid prince and poet Tamim ibn al Mu'izz (337 74/948 84), to name a
few; but those writers and poets who stood close to the throne or wielded
power in their own right merely made use of the emblems of sovereignty
which had already been created by men of letters.

Men of letters were, then, intimate spectators, in fact or in imagination, of
the human drama bound up in the exercise of power, and they saw themselves
as the guides and often collaborators of the elite, urging them to espouse
justice and wisdom. This is an aspect of adab that finds heightened expression

in books of 'counsel for princes' (nasihat al muluk) or mirrors for princes.
Sometimes these were composed for the use of a specific prince, for example
al Tha'alibfs (350 429/961 1038) Adab al muluk (Conduct of princes), written
in the far east of Iran and addressed to the young khwarazmshah al Ma'mun II
before his murder in 408/1017. Sometimes they were more oblique offerings,
inviting a wider audience to reflect on the meaning of kingship and the duties
of the rulers and the ruled.

The sense that possessed men of adab of addressing an elite as the spokes
men of a common moral endeavour is voiced clearly by Ibn [Abd Rabbih
(246 328/860 940), the first writer to give coherent shape in Islamic Spain to
the materials of eastern adab. A poet and courtier of mawla descent, his
ambition was to be a missionary of adab to his own people. His al c Iqd (The
necklace, later dubbed al Iqd alfafid (The unique necklace): it consists of
twenty five chapters, each named for a jewel), is a thematic anthology of what
he considers to be the fundamentals of the human condition, and it is the

402

Arabic literature

history of the Arabs, from pagan tribes to the c Abbasid caliphate, that illus
trates its truths and tragedies. Ibn c Abd Rabbih had thought hard about the
most pressing intellectual issues raised by the previous generation of eastern
Arabic writers: about rationality and the power of language, questions dis
cussed by al Jahiz, especially in his Kitab al bay an wa al tabyin, and about adab
and the role of books, rather than the traditional oral study circle, as the key to

self cultivation, a theme dear to Ibn Qutayba, as also to Ibn Abi Tahir
Tayfur.
The c Iqd is prefaced by a definition of adab, which is open to the
experiences of
all ages and nations, as 'a goodly tree with lofty branches, growing in
good soil
and bearing ripe fruits; whoso eats of these is heir to prophecy'. Adab is
human
experience standing in the light of reason Caql), which God calls 'the
dearest
to Me of My creation, which I give to those creatures I love best'. 42
These ideas
structure both Ibn [Abd Rabbih's prefaces and the materials he quotes
within
chapters. The c Iqd was completed under c Abd al Rahman III (r. 300
50/912 61)
in the heyday of Umayyad Cordoba, and it is perhaps for this reason that
the
topics of sovereignty, sultan and how to approach the sovereign play an
important part in it.

Some seventy years later, when many petty kingdoms were emerging
from the wreck of the Cordoba caliphate, Ibn 'Abd al Barr al Namari
(368 463/978 1070) composed an anthology called Bahjat al majalis wa
uns
al mujalis (The glory of salons and the civility of those who take part in
them). This too contains a substantial section on maxims concerning
sultan.
The rest of Ibn 'Abd al Barr's ouqjut was devoted to religious topics, and
for
him adab is a repository of wisdom rather than reason, but like Ibn c Abd
Rabbih he claims a divine origin for it, and especially for the wisdom
embodied in poetry: 'Every piece of wisdom not sent down as scripture or
given to a prophet to deliver, God has held in store for the tongues of
poets
to utter.' 43

If Ibn 'Abd al Barr succeeded in transforming adab into piety, less than a
century later the Andalusian Sufi Abu Bakr al Turtushi (451 520/1059
1126),
whose wanderings finally led him to settle in Fatimid Egypt, transformed
piety
into highly wrought adab in his Siraj al muluk (Lantern for princes). As
Ibn
Khaldun (d. 808/1406) remarked, the Siraj is sermon like rather than

42 Trans. J. Bray in ''Abbasid myth and the human act: Ibn 'Abd Rabbih and others', in
P. F. Kennedy (ed.), On fiction and adab in medieval Arabic literature (Wiesbaden, 2005),
pp. 14 15.

43 Ibn 'Abd al Barr al Namari, Bahjat al majalis wa uns al mujalis, ed. M. M. al Khuli, 3 vols.
(Beirut, n.d.), vol. I, p. 38.

403

The New Cambridge History of Islam

analytical: 44 this was indeed an age of great literary sermons, which reduced
huge audiences to tears; the best documented are those of the Baghdad! Ibn
al Jawzi (c. 511 97/1116 1201), hadith scholar, historian, adib and champion of a
revived 'Abbasid caliphate. Al Turtushi contributed to a tradition that married
piety to splendour of language and to activism; his targets included the
Fatimid vizier al Ma'mun al Bata'ihi, to whom he presented the Siraj, and
the Almoravid Yusuf ibn Tashfin (453 500/1061 1107), and he counted Ibn
Tumart (d. 524/1130), the founder of the Almohad dynasty, among his pupils.
The Siraj is full of references to recent history and historical figures from
al Andalus to Iran, all enveloped in an air of enchantment: it has the great
vizier Nizam al Mulk (d. 485/1092), himself in real life the author of a Persian
mirror for princes, Siyasatnatna, tell his master, the Saljuq sultan Malikshah:
'Your armies will fight for you with swords two cubits long . . . but I have made
for you an army called the Army of the Night. When your armies sleep at
night, the Armies of the Night arise in ranks before their Lord, and weep, and

pray, and raise their hands in supplication to God for you and your
soldiers.' 45
Here, as in many similar works, adab and piety combine to turn history
into
myth and transform both into folklore.

Adab and personal networks

As well as a sense of moral community, often elitist, personal
connections,
often clannish, begin to be displayed in adab works from the fourth/tenth
century. Many of Abu al Faraj al Isfahan!' s informants for his Kitab al
aghanl
belong to a circle of intimate acquaintances, some of them family
members, 4
while in his pupil al Tanukhf s collection of stories with providentially
happy
endings, al Faraj ba c d al shidda, material belonging to the common
literary
stock was taught to al Tanukhi by family and friends and is applied to his
and
their personal experiences. Miskawayh's history of the chaotic prelude to
his
own times relies on eyewitnesses connected with his own circles, and,
in a new departure, authors of the period begin to memorialise not the
great figures of the past but their own contemporaries: al Tanukhf s
Nishwar
al muhadara (Table talk of a Mesopotamian judge) consists entirely of
per
sonal, oral reminiscences by contemporaries of his father, and, a little
later, al
Tha'alibfs Yatlmat al dahr fx mahasin ahl al c asr (Unique pearl of all time
concerning the excellences of the people of this age) is the first large
scale

44 Ibn Khaldun, Muqaddima, quoted in editor's introduction to al
Turtushi, Siraj al muluk,
ed. M. F. Abu Bakr, 2 vols. (Cairo, 1414/1994), vol. I, p. 37.

45 Al Turtushi, Siraj, vol. II, chap. 48, p. 515.

46 Kilpatrick, Making the Great book of songs, pp. 14 15.

404

anthology of contemporary written adab, a substantial proportion of it com
posed by people personally known to al Tha'alibi or his friends. 47

The Yatima provided a lasting model. Its region by region structure is
copied in, for example, Ibn Ma'sum's (1052 1107/ 1642 1705) Suldfat aVasr fi
mahasin al shu^ara' bi hull misf) (Choicest pressings [of the grape] /The best of
this age, concerning the excellences of poets of every region). Its immediate
successors were Dumyat al qasr wa 'usrat ahl al l asr (The fair maid of the
palace and haven of the people of this age) by al Bakharzi (c. 418 67/1027
75), who met al Tha'alibi as a child, and the vast Kharidat al qasr wajaridat
al ^asr (Unpierced pearl /damsel of the palace and tally of the age) of 'Imad
al Din al Isfahan! (519 97/1125 1201), also well known as one of Saladin's
aides and chroniclers. 48 (The echoing titles, early examples of an enduring
fashion, are deliberate hommages to al Tha'alibi and to each other.) The
Yatima, Dumya and Khafida all aim to give the widest possible conspectus,
for caliphal Baghdad is no longer the focus as it almost automatically was in
earlier works. Tiny scraps are deemed worthy of recording and are tracked
down by word of mouth, providing the sole record of many amateurs
and obscure jobbing wordsmiths; but since the compilers moved in high
political circles, many of their sources are statesmen with a literary bent, and
they record many pieces given in the majalis of grandees or recited in public
on ceremonial occasions; al Bakharzi notes exact dates and places of
performance.

The linguistic map of adab

Not least striking is what is omitted: al Tha'alibi and al Bakharzi, natives of the
Iranian east, both knew Persian, yet neither discusses contemporary New

Persian writing. Similarly Ibn Ma'sum, who lived in Mughal India and died in
Shlraz: in his short section on the poets of contemporary Persia he quotes a
mere handful of Persian verses; all the rest is Arabic. As this last example
suggests, membership of the great tradition of Arabic adab long remained a
mark of distinction, even in Muslim societies where Arabic had ceased to be
the main language of high culture and where the local literatures had devel
oped on very different lines.

47 Partial prosopography in E. K. Rowson and S. Bonebakker, Notes on two poetic anthol
ogies: Ta'alibl's Tatimma and Bakharzi's Dumya (Los Angeles, 1984).

48 Bibliographies in G.J. H. van Gelder, 'Ibn Ma'sum', EAL, vol. I, p. 349; E. K. Rowson,
'al Bakharzi, 'All ibn al Hasan', EAL, vol. I, p. 129; E. K. Rowson, 'al Tha'alibl', EAL, vol.
II, pp. 764 5; C. Hillenbrand, ''Imad al Din al Isfahan!', EAL, vol. I, pp. 392 3.

405

The New Cambridge History of Islam

Transitions and reorientations

A new learning: scope and formats

In 463/1071 the funeral took place in Baghdad of al Khatib al Baghdad!, preacher, teacher and historian of renown, and a figure representative of the
new directions being taken by Arabic culture. As an adib he wrote on the comic and grotesque topic of misers, following the lead of aljahiz's Kitab al bukhala' (Book of misers) two centuries before, and his Kitab al lufayliyyin

(Book of spongers) is in keeping with the fashion for low life themes set in the
previous century by such eminences as the vizier al Sahib Ibn 'Abbad; but he
was, above all, a hadith scholar. It was as such that the crowds who followed
his bier to the grave acclaimed him, in this period of Sunnl assertiveness and
sharpened sectarian identities, and as such that he wrote the collective
biography of the city of Baghdad, the Ta'rikh Baghdad (History of Baghdad),
an alphabetical portrait gallery of intellectual notables great and small which
focuses above all on their role in the transmission of tradition. Yet he had a
poor memory and relied on written notes, whereas hadith had always been
viewed as an art of memory; and he broke with his affiliation to the arch
traditionists, the Hanbalis, and became a Shaft 1 ! and Ash'ari. Despite his
obsession with Baghdad, much of his career was spent in Syria, where he
found himself in danger of his life from the law, Yaqut tells us, because of a
love affair with a Sh! c ! youth. It was there too that in 456/1064 he taught adab
and gave discreet charity to a student who was to become al Khatib al Tibriz!
(421 502/1030 1109), the great commentator of the pre Islamic poets and of
Abu Tammam, al Mutanabb! and Abu al 'Ala' al Ma'arr!. 49

The span of al Khatib al BaghdadTs career saw teaching and learning and
formats of writing begin to settle into formalised patterns. This had less to do
with the spread of madrasas and institutional provision for scholarship in the
latter part of his life than with the maturing of intellectual specialisations which
had begun in the second half of the previous century. The trend towards
tightening terminology and the style of discussion to fit with the subject in
hand an example is al Amidl's poetic criticism (see p. 388 above) gave rise
to disciplinary decorum, to an academic approach which was to be one
of the features of the new adab. The way had been paved for it by such
developments as the elegant, learning made easy manuals which al Tha'alibi
had excelled at producing: these, despite their nonchalant appearance, rested on

49 Yaqut, Irshad, vol. I, pp. 392 3.

Arabic literature

hard thought a critical systematisation of areas of literary competence
translated into textbook formats for easy reference and assimilation.

The academicisation of knowledge, including adab, effected a synthesis
between two previously competing modes of cultural authority, the oral
and
the written. From an early date oral and written composition (e.g. of
poetry)
and transmission (e.g. ofhadith) had coexisted, and the oral had in theory
been
preferred as not only more reliable but more authentic. Orality had the
incidental advantage of inclusiveness: it enabled the unlettered or merely
unlearned, and the blind, such as Bashshar and Abu al 'Ala' al Ma'am, to
leave
their mark. But the imprint of orality, supposedly the mode par
excellence of
poetry since pre Islamic times, is perceptible above all in the formats of c
Abbasid
prose, in which the two basic, stylised components of oral information
seeking
are ubiquitous across genres: the chain of informants, as it is called in
English, or
'prop' (isnad): 'I was told by X, who said: I was told by Y, who said: I was
told
by Z', and the 'text' (matn) or 'item of information' (khabar, pi. akhbaf),
e.g. 'The
Prophet said: the slave who gives his master good counsel and worships
God
well will receive a double reward' (a hadith not without political
applications); or
'In Baghdad there was once a rich young man who inherited a fortune
from

his father, but fell in love with a jariya and spent so much on her that he ruined himself (the beginning of a love story from al Tanukhi's al Faraj ba'd al shidda). 50 Such oral formulae are the building blocks of prose adab. They can be organised into illustrative or argumentative patterns, as in Ibn 'Abd Rabbih's 'Iqd, yet still accommodate ongoing research, as with Abu al Faraj al Isfahan!' s unfinished Kitab al aghani, or revision, as with al Tanukhi's al Faraj ba'd al shidda, which like many compositions went through several emendations after 'pub lication'. They shape not only literary formats, so that texts made up of a mosaic of akhbar are overwhelmingly commoner than uninterrupted narratives, but also concepts of authorship. When a prose author sets out a topic, he almost always quotes, adding perhaps some comments in his own voice. Only the epistolographer or essayist, or the poet, makes his own voice the vehicle of his composition.

Isnads acquired minute scholarly rigour in the adab of the fourth/ tenth century. They encoded processes of research, whether among people or books, enabling readers to identify knowledge economies on the basis of prosopographical links, to gauge the reliability of information and anticipate the register of a khabar. serious, ironic, pious or sentimental. For later writers

50 alTanukhi, al Faraj ba'd al shidda, ed. 'A. al Shalji, 5 vols. (Beirut, 1398/1978), vol. IV, p. 316.

407

al Khapb al Baghdadfs Ta'rikh Baghdad was a prime source for the knowledge
economies of his time, and as such was quarried freely by Yaqut, and by Ibn al
Jawzi for his al Muntazam (Well ordered history), and it is the voices of his
informants that for later generations embody the spirit of Buyid Baghdad, whose adab and scholarship afforded a second golden age after that of the
great 'Abbasids.

The self-conception of the new learning

For all their admiration of their predecessors, the bearers of the new learning felt
themselves to be their worthy successors. In the scholarship of this period isnads
may consist of two tiers: a first, sometimes symbolic, sequence of classical
tradents; and a second string of contemporary scholars, for whom the networks
of their own world of knowledge are of equal importance with a khabar's classical pedigree. Such tiered isnads are found in al Sarraj's Masarf al 'ushshaq.

If one of the characteristics of the new learning is its careful academic discipline, this often contrasts with its performative aspects. Orality finds new
outlets in ever larger public lectures and ever more crowded and emotional
preaching sessions and recitations of hadith. Writing provides the script for
such performances, and the oral and written modes are so little in conflict that
adibs and other intellectuals often seem, in their biographies, to be performing
parts written for them: in Yaqut's gallery of eccentrics the full panoply of literary media, oral and written saf, preaching and epistolography, poetry prepared or improvised, gesture and slapstick, is deployed to show the elements that make up a personality. Generic decorum has become so well
established that it affords individuals opportunities of expressing socially suspect aspects of their personalities and passing them off as literary poses,
particularly through the medium of love poetry and wine poetry. Because the
Arabic poet always writes as T, the identity of the poetic T can always be disclaimed as fictional and autobiographical intentions repudiated.

Verse proliferated, especially semi amateur occasional verse. Whether
stilted or accomplished, minor verse should not be dismissed as
insignificant.
For all its ambivalence it was the medium of emotional, and sometimes
spiritual, autobiography. People turned to poetry naturally to express
them
selves, as they did not to prose. Such is the function of al Khatib al
Baghdadfs
homoerotic poetry, which Yaqut quotes at the end of his biography. 51
No less

51 Yaqut, Irshad, vol. I, pp. 393 5. On the role of such poetry in later
biography see K. El
Rouayheb, 'The love of boys in Arabic poetry of the early Ottoman period,
1500 1800',
Middle Eastern Literatures, 8 (2005).

408

Arabic literature

importantly, verse underpinned literary expectations and literary develop
ment, for the enterprise of adab increasingly assumed that every adib
would
have had some experience of composing poetry, and that his or her mind
would be trained in the associations and logic of poetic thought.

Consequently, the poetic system imparted its particularities to Arabic
prose.
In its long journey from pre Islamic Arabia to the courts of Muslim rulers,
always maintaining the majesty of the qasida but branching out on the
way into
new genres love and wine poetry and descriptive verse (wasf) are some
of the
most prominent and into non classical forms, such as the muwashshah
and
zajal, Arabic poetry preserved and intensified the feature that marked it
out

from surrounding literatures and gave it a particular potency: its non
narrativity.
Arabic poetry does not tell a story; it explores states of mind and feeling.
Its
diction is concentrated and allusive. So too is that of Arabic prose.
Although it
may often seem that prose gives free rein, in compulsive anecdotage, to
the
story telling urge denied in poetry, the khabar formula tends to fragment
narrative and to defer resolution indefinitely. Every khabar supposes a
back
story, and is weighted with explicit or latent cross reference to
prototypes and
variants, much as is the poetic system of themes and motifs.

The ambivalence of the poetic T is also present in the prose khabar. Very
few
akhbar carry a specific ideological imprint. The message that an author
wishes a
khabar to convey emerges only when he has combined it with other
akhbar
according to the rules of his own intellectual syntax. Just as poetic
confession can
be passed off as a pose or metaphor, so the syntax of individual works of
adab
can be disregarded, and adab as a whole treated as neutral ground.

The maqama

These developments explain how al Hamadhani (358 98/968 1008), nick
named Bad? al Zaman ('The Marvel of the Age'), could invent a new
literary
genre, the maqama (pi. maqamat), which he launched in the princely
courts
of his native Iran with such success that, a hundred years later, al Hariri
(446 516/1054 1122) repatriated it to Iraq, where the new learning which
al
Hamadhani had invited his audiences to treat as a game was acquiring
institu
tional contours.

The Hamadhanian maqama 5 * is a well prepared but improvisatory
slapstick
performance, always 'reported', in a derisory isnad, by the same, solitary

52 The meaning of the word is disputed. For full bibliographies of al
Hamadhani and

al Hariri see J. Hameen Anttila, Maqama: A history of a genre (Wiesbaden, 2002); for
critical approaches see Kennedy, 'The maqamat as a nexus of interests'.

409

narrator. Its anti hero is a sponger, beggar and trickster of no fixed appearance
or personality, with whom the autobiographical narrator finds himself thrown
together for no good reason. As fellow adventurers or antagonists, the couple
slither through every genre and register of adab; each of their encounters is
futile in a different way, and a bathetic poetic flourish underlines its mock
resolution. The pair are doomed to meet again and again, the narrator usually
failing to recognise the hero until the last minute though sometimes, unaccountably, they part company, and the worthy narrator takes on the shiftiness of the anti hero. The more crude and ludicrous the situation, the more perfectly judged is the saf employed as its vehicle. On one level the maqama is an exercice de style: story types, protagonists, register and
narrative development are wilfully mismatched. But disconcertingly, the Hamadhanian maqama can also be the showcase for a robust realism. Comedy had reached comparable heights in aljahiz's Kitab al bukhala\ but
even al Jahiz had not made his readers quite so uncomfortable about deciding
whether they were dupes or accomplices, and whether the protagonists' antics
meant anything or nothing at all.

Al Hariri's collection of fifty maqdmat is to all appearances vastly more literary; indeed, he designed it to be read as an educational exercise. It is elaborately intertextual: al Hamadharii is a constant, but oblique term of reference, and there are many others. It retains the autobiographical formula,

but has none of al Hamadharii' s boisterousness. Al Hariri's playfulness is
invested not in the psychological puzzles and trick storylines that he
borrows
from al Hamadharii, but rather in the chameleon concept of adab itself. The
staid narrator, the anti hero and the perplexed spectators all lay claim to
adab
as a proof of their own moral worth and ability to discern it in others. Like the
poetic T, adab endlessly switches hosts; those who lay claim to it may be
liars,
but adab itself is always authentic.

Al Hariri's maqdmat are closely attuned to contemporary conceptions of
adab, of life, and of their interpenetration. Autobiographical passages in,
for
example, al Bakharzi's Dumya, 'Imad al Din al Isfahan!' s writings and
Yaqut's
portraits of contemporaries make clear the extent to which adibs viewed
and
described their own lives through an optic little less literarised than al
Hariri's.

Modernity

As important in the reorientation of adab as the crystallisation of the new
learning was a factor without which, for many, the new learning was
devoid of
meaning: the advent of new schools of thought such as the 'Oriental
philos
ophy' of Ibn Sina (d. 428/1037) and the illuminationist school of Shihab al
Din

410

Arabic literature

Yahya al Suhrawardi (549 87/1153 91). These theosophies stimulated
their
followers to enquire into all the branches of knowledge necessary to an

understanding of man's place in the cosmos. One path of understanding was
Sufism, and Sufism now became a frequent ingredient of an adxb's makeup.
Conversely, the great Sufi poets such as Ibn al 'Arab! (560 638/1165 1240) and
Ibn al Farid (576 632/1181 1235) exploited all the resources of literary learning
and were remarkable for their mastery of academic adab.

The adxbs of the post classical period often sought to become polymaths poets, mathematicians, metaphysicians and physicians in order to create a
coherent intellectual universe in keeping with the underlying unity of the cosmos and its aesthetic splendour, into which the teachings of the Sufi theosophers gave them insights that had previously formed no part either of science or of adab. An example of the striving for completeness is the Kashkul (Begging bowl /Provision bag) of Baha' al Din al c Amili (953 1030/
1547 1621), a Shi c i from Syria who settled in Safavid Persia. Much of the poetry
quoted in this anthology, which contains both Arabic and Persian including
Indo Persian material, is recent or contemporary: no less than their Buyid,
Ayyubid or Mamluk predecessors, writers of this period are aware of their
own modernity; they have mastered the classical literary heritage but are not
in thrall to it.

The range of purely literary expertise that an adxb was now expected to possess was very extensive indeed, and the supercommentary becomes a characteristic form not just of works of scholarship such as 'Abd al Qadir al Baghdad? s (1030 93/1631 82) Khizanat al adab (Treasury of adab), an expli
cation, with much additional matter, of the 956 poetic passages cited by al Astarabadhi (d. c. 688/1289) in his commentary on Ibn al Hajib's (d. 646/
1249) exhaustive treatise on syntax, al Kafiya, 53 but also of what are, on one
level, original works, such as the Tazyin alAswaq (Embellishment of The market) attributed to the blind physician and theosopher Da'ud al Antaki (d. c. 1008/ 1599), a work on mystical love and love poetry, which is a debate
with al BiqaTs (d. 885/1480) Aswaq al ashwaqfi Masari' al 'ushshaq (The calami
ties of lovers [put on] The market of desire), which in turn takes as its point of

departure al Sarraj's MasarV al 'ushshaq, and engages with a huge range of
sources, recent and classical, from the east and west of the Arabo Islamic world. 54

53 M. G. Carter, "Abd al Qadir ibn 'Umar al Baghdad?, EAL, vol. I, pp. 15 16; M. G. Carter,
'al Astarabadhi', EAL, vol. I, pp. no n; and M. G. Carter, 'Ibn al Hajib', EAL, vol. I, p. 328.

54 L. A. Giffen, 'al Antaki, Da'ud ibn 'Umar', EAL, vol. I, p. 92; and L. A. Giffen, 'al Biqa'i,
Ibrahim ibn 'Umar, al Shafi'i', EAL, vol. I, p. 152, and references.

411

The New Cambridge History of Islam

The new sociology of adab

Changes in the way adab was acquired and put to use during the Ottoman
period are documented in two genres in particular: the literary travelogue
(rihla) cum autobiography, of which examples have survived from across
the Arabic speaking world; 55 and the poetic correspondence, of which the
Syrian Darwish Muhammad al Taluwf s (d. 1014/1606) Sanihat Duma al qasr
fi mutarahat barii al 'asr (Poetical correspondence with contemporaries,
inspired by Dumyat al qasr) is a personal anthology. The title echoes
al Bakharzf s Dumya, but the core of the work consists of poetic letters of
self introduction (mutarahat). These were a means for younger adibs to
attract the attention of seniors with teaching or other posts in their gift, a
sign of the institutionalisation of adab and of the hierarchisation of the
fellowship of letters.

The ever greater mastery of an ever expanding body of high culture, and

intense competition to reap its social and professional fruits, were one, widely

attested, aspect of modernity in adab. But there is also evidence of divergent

trends, attested above all in Mamluk and Ottoman Egypt. One such was a

broadening of the range of what was considered readable in polite society to

include a semi colloquial literature, of which the best studied examples are Ibn

Sudun's (c. 810 68/1407 64) comic occasional poems, and the late eleventh/

seventeenth century al Shirbims anti pastoral Hazz al quhuffi sharh qasid Abi

Shaduf '(The nodding noddles: a gloss on the odes of Abu Shaduf/the irrigator),

which is also a skit on the genre of the learned poetic commentary. 56 Another

trend was a widening of the urban readership: the growth of a culture of

reading for relaxation rather than improvement has been traced among the

bourgeoisie of early modern Cairo. 57 It has been argued that among the urban

merchant classes there had long been functionally literate but not highly

educated readers who enjoyed books written in non vernacular but not

over correct, 'middle' Arabic, and that the Thousand and one nights, and the

heroic romances (siras), belong to this intermediate register. 58

55 Preliminary survey in H. Toelle and K. Zakharia, A la decouverte de la litterature arabe du
Vie siecle a nos jours (Paris, 2003), pp. 190 2.

56 G.J. van Gelder, 'The nodding noddles or Jolting the yokels: A composition for marginal
voices by al ShirbTni (fl. 1687)', in R. Osde (ed.), Marginal voices in literature and society:
Individual and society in tfte Mediterranean Muslim world (Strasbourg, 2000).

57 N. Hanna, In praise of books: A cultural history of Cairo's middle class, sixteenth to the
eighteenth century (Cairo, 2004).

58 A. Chraibi, 'Classification des traditions narratives arabes par "conte type":
Application a l'etude de quelques roles de poete', Bulletin d'Etudes Orientales, 50

(1998), pp. 31 9, 42 3-

412

Arabic literature

The social basis of early modern adab is of course more complex than
analyses based simply on the economic standing of its readers can
suggest; and
above all, the position of writers still awaits systematic investigation
within the
wider framework of an exploration of the formation of identities. Ibn
Sudun
was the son of a Mamluk slave soldier, and as such neither a Mamluk nor
an
Egyptian; adab afforded him a niche in society and a bare living. 59 Al
Taluwi's
father had been a Turk in Ottoman service and his mother a Syrian noble
woman; socially he fell between two stools, and trained in youth as an
artisan;
again, it was adab that offered him wider opportunities. From the
beginnings
of Islamic Arabic literature, poetry and letters had afforded a means of
self
betterment; this much did not change over the centuries. State and social
organisation did change, however, as did the languages and literatures
with
which Arabic had to compete; yet adab, which had followed Arab
conquest or
settlement even to remote and impermanent footholds, imposed itself
every
where as an essential component of an Islamic society. Much of what was
involved in this process remains to be discovered.

59 A. Vrolijk, 'The better self of a dirty old man: Personal sentiments in
the poetry of 'All
ibn Sudun (1407 1464)', in Ostle (ed.), Marginal voices in literature and
society.

14

Persian literature

DICK DAVIS

Literature in New Persian, a language based on Middle Persian but containing
a large admixture of Arabic loan words, and written in a modified form of the
Arabic script, began to be composed in eastern Iran in the late third/ninth
century (some two centuries after the Arab conquest), and by the mid to late
fourth/tenth century boasted a flourishing school of writers centred on the
Samanid court in Khurasan. As with a number of literatures that have grown
up in the shadow of prestigious external cultures, a great deal of energy in the
early years was given to translation, a process which both exemplifies and
facilitates the adoption of originally foreign literary criteria and models.
Although the surviving translations from Arabic are in prose (the most famous
of these is al Tabari's Ta'rikh (History), translated and in places extensively
modified by Bal'ami), the influence of Arabic poetic models on Persian
prosody was also clearly extensive. Virtually the whole Persian vocabulary
concerned with prosody is Arabic, and all but two of the numerous metres
used in Persian verse are Arabic in origin. Most telling of all in this regard is the
fact that the few surviving examples of pre Islamic Persian verse indicate that

it was written in accentual metres, whereas poetry in New Persian was written
using the quantitative metres of the Arabic 'arud system. Such a radical shift in
the basic metrical structure of verse implies the presence of massive culture
intimidation and assimilation.

However, alongside Arabic literary production as a significant model, elements derived from pre Islamic Persian literature are also discernible in
New Persian works. Two significant long narrative poems from the fifth/ eleventh century, Firdawsts Shahnama (completed c. 400/1010) and Gurganf s
Wis wa Ramin (c. 442/1050), provide evidence, extending beyond their almost
exclusively pre Islamic subject matter, of pre Islamic Persian models. The metre of the Shahnama (mutaqarib), which became the standard metre for
epic in Persian, is one of the two Persian metres not derived from Arabic, and
is probably a quantitative adaptation of a pre Islamic Persian accentual metre;

414

Persian literature

the rhetoric of Wis wa Ramin, a romance which is almost certainly Parthian in
origin, has much in common with the so called 'Asiatic' rhetoric of Greek and
Latin literature in Late Antiquity, and in all likelihood reproduces Parthian and
Sasanian rhetorical strategies. Evidence of the presence of pre Islamic Persian
models is less clear in the case of non narrative poetry, but as the rhetoric of
the earliest lyric poets (e.g. Rudaki) is close to that of Wis wa Ramin (e.g. in the

common stock of images) it is likely that here too there are rhetorical survivals
from pre Islamic Iran.

The literary energy of medieval Persian societies was largely devoted to
verse, but significant and influential prose works were also written, chiefly in
the four genres of histories (both universal and local); mirrors for princes;
works of ethical and religious edification; and popular prose romances. Apart
from Bal'amfs translation of al Tabari mentioned above, the most important
early history is that of Bayhaqi (fifth /eleventh century); subsequent significant
histories include the Tarikh i Slstan (fifth/ eleventh century, the Tarikh ijahan
gusha (History of the world conqueror) of Juwaym (d. 681/1283) and the Jam?
al tawarikh (Compendium of chronicles) of Rashid al Din (d. 718/1318). The
two most memorable mirrors for princes are the Qabusnama of Kay Kavus ibn
Iskandar (fifth/eleventh century), and the Siyasatnama (Book of statecraft) of
Nizam al Mulk (d. 485/1092). The very popular Indian Fables of Bidpal was
originally considered to be an allegorical mirror for princes (it is characterised
as such in the Shahnama); this work appeared in various guises in Persian,
most notably as the Kalila wa Dimna of Nasr Allah (c. 538/1144).

Histories and mirrors for princes were written chiefly by authors familiar
with court life, and for a cultivated court audience. Works of ethical (often
specifically Sufi) edification, such as the Kashf al mahjub (Revelation of the
hidden) (c. 442/1050) appear to have been aimed at largely artisan and middle
class Sufi circles, and their sympathisers. The most famous ethical prose work
of Persian literature is Sa'di's Gulistan (656/1258), a collection of anecdotes
(which include gnomic verses) arranged into eight books according to their
subject matter. Prose romances were clearly written for more varied audien

ces, and they often include many details drawn from both urban and rural

middle and lower class life. A romance like the Darabnama of Tarsusi can be

presumed to have had written literary antecedents (Tarsus!' s work shows

evidence of influence from Hellenistic narratives), and its intended audience

was presumably literate. However, the rhetoric of a work such as the anon

ymous Samak i 'ayyar suggests that at least some parts of the text are derived

from oral performances intended originally for illiterate or only marginally

literate audiences. The Safarnama (travel narrative) of Nasir i Khusraw

(d. c. 465/1072) is the first significant work in what was later to become a flourishing minor prose genre.

The earliest prose works, notably the early histories, were written in a direct, largely paratactic style (one that was, incidentally, to have a major influence on twentieth century Persian prose), whose main if not sole purpose
was clearly the conveying of information. This style dropped out of favour fairly quickly, and was replaced by a more rhetorically self conscious manner,
much given to increasingly elaborate periphrases (notable examples of an extreme periphrastic style are to be found in the Timurid and especially Safavid histories). The tradition of rhymed and rhythmic prose, deriving from Arabic models (most obviously the Qur] an), was at first used chiefly
for devotional works like Ansari's (d. 412/1021) Tabaqat al sufiyya (History of
the Sufis), or ethical works such as the Gulistan, but in time left its mark, in
varying degrees, on works in most prose genres.

The development of Persian verse has traditionally been divided according
to three historically successive styles: the Khurasan!; the 'Iraqi; and the Hindi
(Indian). Although there is considerable continuity between the styles, they
are nevertheless a useful way of broadly characterising prevailing poetic
practice at any given time. As its name indicates, the Khurasan! style originated
in Khurasan (north eastern Iran, extending at this time as far north as Bukhara
and Samarqand); it was first significantly practised by the poets associated with
the Samanid court (261 395/875 1005), and remained the predominant style
into the sixth/twelfth century. It typically aims for dignity and immediacy of
emotional effect, and shows a predilection for relatively simple rhetorical
devices (e.g. anaphora, which it employs extensively). Most of the imagery
of the Khurasan! style belongs to a common stock, whose ubiquity suggests
that, even at the opening of the period, it was an already well established
inheritance from previous literary traditions, although some of the poets
whose work is characterised as being in the Khurasan! style (e.g. Gurgani)
can occasionally also use startlingly arresting and (perhaps) original imagery.

The Khurasan! style saw the emergence of the predominant genres of
Persian poetry: these include the short poem or epigram, generally in the
four line rubaH form, or as a qatV (i.e. fragment, a form often used for satire
and invective); the medium length qasida and the related ghazal; and the long
narrative, which could be epic, romance, a didactic /mystical work or some
combination of the three. Narratives are always written in the couplet
(mathnawi) form; the other forms employ monorhyme. Stanzaic forms exist
in Persian but are rare. An interesting gender distinction is apparent between
long, narrative poems, and shorter forms such as the ghazal. Narrative poems

416

that deal with erotic themes are virtually always concerned with heterosexual
relationships; ghazals, and many epigrams, often celebrate homosexual ped
erastic relationships, and the fall back assumption for short medieval erotic
poems, if a specific gender is not indicated, is that they are addressed to boys.
The cause for this distinction is unclear, though it may be connected with the
apparendy differing historical traditions from which the genres emerged.
Many poets wrote both pederastic and heterosexual poems, and personal
sexual preferences were probably much less significant than expectations
defined by genre.

The first recorded (in the Tarikh i Sistan) poem in New Persian is a qasida
by Muhammad Vasif in praise of the Saffarid ruler Ya c qub ibn al Layth, written
around 257/870 CE. As its name indicates, the qasida form was adopted from
Arabic, and the rhetoric of the typical Persian qasida is heavily dependent on
Arab models. As Bausani has written of Rudakl (d. 329/940), 'We are in the
presence of . . . a linguistic Iranization of Arabic conceptual traditions and lyric
elements.' 1 The qasida is typically, though not exclusively, a praise poem
written for a court personage: J. T. P. De Bruijn has shrewdly observed that
the qasida functioned in Persian courts more or less as the formal court
portrait functioned in European courts. 2 The two factors of praise and the
court indicate the direction the rhetoric of Persian poetry was to take well into
the modern period. Unless the intent is satirical, virtually all short and
medium length poems in Persian adopt the courtier patron relationship as
the implicit model guiding the treatment of the poem's subject. The great
majority of such poems address a 'you', or refer to a 'he/she', who is hyper

bolically idealised by the speaker, and who correspondingly humbles himself
before his subject. The stylistic conventions that resulted were not only applied to the patron courtier relationship from which they may be presumed
to have arisen, but also to other subject matter, such as carnal love or religious
devotion. The rhetorical strategies of poems dealing with these three subjects,
which are by far the commonest concerns addressed in non narrative Persian
verse, are virtually indistinguishable. The fact that the poetry developed in
court settings gave it a strong predilection for imagery drawn from luxurious
substances and objects associated with the court (precious metals, jewels, rich
fabrics and so forth), and also encouraged a leisurely connoisseurship in its
audience, which gradually came to prize an intricate intertextuality that

1 A. Bausani, Storia detta letteratura persiana (Milan, i960), p. 310.

2 J. T. P. De Bruijn, Persian Sufi poetry: An introduction to tfte mystical use of classical poems
(London, 1997), p. 30.

417

The New Cambridge History of Islam

presupposed a wide knowledge of the poetic tradition, as well as the culti vation of more and more outre rhetorical effects.

The qaslda was typically divided into three unequal sections: an introduc tion; a transitional passage; and hyperbolic praise of a patron. The traditional
introduction of the Arabic qaslda, descriptive of the deserted campsite of the

poet's beloved, involved two elements which were independently developed
by Persian poets: the description of a natural scene; and the evocation of erotic
longing. The former was often linked, either explicitly or implicitly, by Persian
poets to pre Islamic Persian solar festivals (especially the spring festival of
Nawruz, but also sometimes the autumn festival of Mihragan), which enabled
them to provide detailed descriptions of either spring or autumn landscapes
(often in the form of a garden explicitly compared to the patron's court). The
erotic topos was similarly elaborated, and, as well as longing for an absent
beloved, could include delight in the beloved's presence, and taxonomic
descriptions of the beloved's beauty. The chief lyric form of Persian poetry,
the ghazal, would seem to have developed as a result of this introductory
section being treated as an independent unit. What can be considered as
'proto ghazals' can be found in the work of the Samanid poets (e.g. Rudaki
and Shahid) but it is not until the Ghaznavid period that the genre emerges
fully fledged, most clearly in the work of Sana 3 ! (d. 536/1141). The epigram
matic forms ofrubaH and qati 1 generally employ a similar rhetoric to that of the
ghazal. The largely stock nature of this rhetoric has meant that the ascription
of specific poems to specific authors can prove difficult (unless, as is the case
with many ghazals, the poem is 'signed' by the inclusion of the poet's name at
the end of the poem), and this has been particularly the case with epigrams, a
number of which are ascribed in the manuscript sources to different poets,
apparently sometimes merely because the sentiments expressed in them are
associated with those poets. It is virtually certain, for example, that many of
the sceptical and anacreontic rubaHyat attributed to 'Umar al Khayyam
(439 526/1048 1131) are not in fact by him.

The Khurasani style is dominated, in aesthetic achievement as well as in
sheer bulk, by a number of narrative mathnawls, both as epic and
romance.

The major epic is the Shahnama of Firdawsl (329 c. 411/940 1020), which
recounts the pre Islamic myths and romanticised history of Iran, from the
creation of the world until the Arab conquest of the seventh century CE.
In a
number of ways the Shahnama can seem closer to Indian epics such as
the
Mahabharata and the Ramayana than to, say, the Iliad. These include: its
great
length (c. 50,000 lines); its multiplicity of characters and generations; the
uncertainty of the manuscript tradition; and, connected with this last
point,

418

Persian literature

the existence of an ancient and still living folk tradition which continues
both
to feed the poem and feed off it, producing new versions of familiar
stories.
However, there are also strong similarities to western epics; for example,
a
staple theme of western epic is a conflict between the poem's king and its
chief hero (the Iliad begins with such a conflict, between Agamemnon
and
Achilles). This is also a major theme of the Shahnama, one repeated over
a
number of generations and involving a number of feuding kings and
heroes. In
its lengthy examination of the problems of authority, kingship and
heroism
the poem often foregrounds ethical concerns; two distinct kinds of hero
are
portrayed: those who devote themselves to righteousness (and who are
often
martyred, e.g. Siyavash); and those who can be considered as 'trickster
heroes'
(e.g. Rostam, whose patronymic, Dastan, indeed means 'trickery'). Epics,
usually with a figure from Rostam's family either as protagonist or as a
major hero, continued to be written in imitation of Firdawsi's poem
through

out the medieval period, although none approached the stature of the Shahnama.

The most significant romance of the Khurasan! style is the above mentioned Wis wa Ramin by Gurgani (fifth /eleventh century). The poem is
notable for its frank pleasure in carnality, which is presented in and for itself
(there is no suggestion that carnal love either represents or is a poor substitute
for divine love, as became usual in later romances), as well as for its attrac
tively vivid imagery. This poem and two others which are roughly contem
porary with it, and which also utilise pre Islamic material ('Ayyuqi's Warqa wa
Gulshah, and the fragmentary Wamiq wa 'adhra by 'Unsurl), show some similarities to Greek romances of the Hellenistic period, and it is likely that
they draw on plot motifs and tropes common to Greek and Persian cultures
in the early years of the common era.

The Khurasan! period also saw the appearance of the mystical mathnawi, most notably in the work of Sana 1 !, whose Hadiqat al haqxqa (Garden of the
truth) is the first significant example of the form. In SanaTs work a number of
short mystical/ Sufi anecdotes are strung together by a linking didactic com
mentary. Although SanaTs rhetoric is relatively austere compared to that of
his successors, one paradoxical feature of Persian mystical verse that was to
become more pronounced in subsequent centuries is already discernible: the
recommendation, by means of allegorical tales the details of which emphati
cally celebrate the sensual world, that the audience renounce the sensual world.

Although not all the poets associated with the Khurasan! style lived in Khurasan (Gurgan! claimed to have written Wis wa Ramin in Isfahan,

419

The New Cambridge History of Islam

Qatran i Tabriz! (d. 465/1072) was from Azerbaijan; his provincial i.e. non Khurasani Persian was patronisingly referred to by Nasir i Khusraw in his Safarnama), there was nevertheless a broad identification of the style with the
geographical area that gave it its name. The 'Iraqi style, which dominated
Persian verse from the mid sixth/twelfth to the ninth/fifteenth centuries, was
associated chiefly with the south and west of Iran (sometimes known as 'Iraq i
Ajam 'Iraq of the Persians hence the name), especially with Fars and its capital Shiraz, but poets writing according to its criteria worked all over Iran,
and beyond the country's borders. 'Iraqi style is both more lush and more cerebral than Khurasani, and delights in decoration, wordplay and conspicu
ous euphony. Many of the tropes current during the period of the Khurasani
style had become conventional, and in its elaborate use of such conventions
'Iraqi poetry became consciously self referential; at its most sophisticated it presupposed a high level of literary awareness in its audiences. The five
influential mathnawis (a collection of didactic tales, three love romances and a
historical romance) of the Azerbaijani poet Nizami (536 606 / 1141 1209) can be
regarded as transitional between the two styles. Nizami's work may be seen as
an attempt to blend the achievements of his most notable predecessors in the
mathnawi form, in that he took the plots of three of his poems from Firdawsi's
Shahnama, and his rhetoric largely from Gurgani, while their often broadly
Sufi ethos owes something to Sana 3 ! The complex balance of sensual and
allegorical /spiritual concerns evident in his romances, together with the fluency and richness of their rhetoric, have made them the most highly regarded examples of the genre in Persian.

Sufism is the overt subject matter of the mathnawis of Nizami's contempo

rary 'Attar (d. c. 627/1230), the best known of which is the Mantiq altayr (Conference of the birds), an allegorical frame story dealing with the spiritual
life. The major Sufi mathnawi is the Mathnawi yi ma'nawi of Jalal al Din Rumi
(d. 672/1273), which abandons 'Attar's frame structure, and reverts to the more
heterogeneous juxtapositions of Sana 3 ! Although Rumi acknowledged the
influence of both Sana 1 ! and 'Attar, his voice is among the most distinctive in
Persian poetry; he is, for example, virtually the only Persian poet before the
sixteenth century who regularly and with apparent gusto goes beyond the
stock vehicles (broadly, nature and the precious objects associated with court
life) for his imagery.

In conjunction with the elaboration of verse rhetoric, and what one might call the 'Sufification' of its subject matter, a further development is also apparent: a gradual shift of emphasis from the public to the private world.
This is noticeable both in the increasing popularity of the romance, as against

the epic, and also in the emergence of the ghazal, as against the qasida, as the
most significant monorhymed form. Whereas, broadly, the actions (and public
consequences) of epic protagonists are emphasised by epic poets, the feelings of
romance characters are emphasised, and they are often characterised as very
unheroic feelings at that. Similarly, the qasida presupposes a largely public

context and audience, and normally culminates in praise of a politically signifi
cant figure, whereas the ghazal offers itself as a quasi private communing, albeit
in highly conventional terms. The placing of the poet's name as the culminating
moment of the ghazal, whereas the qasida typically moves towards the celebra
tion of the poem's politically significant dedicatee, is emblematic of the shift.
The ghazals of Sa'dl (d. 691/1292) are renowned for their limpidity and elegance,
while those of his successor and fellow townsman Hafiz (d. 792/1390) have been
extravagantly admired for the sophistication and ambiguity with which they
combine erotic and mystical motifs. A contemporary of Hafiz, Jahan Khatun, the
daughter of a ruler of Shlraz, is the only medieval female poet whose diwan
(complete short poems) has come down to us (although she was preceded by
the fourth/tenth fifth/ eleventh century Rabi c a Quzdari, and the sixth/twelfth
century Mahsati; a number of poems by both these female poets, as well as a
few by others, have survived).

The period in which the 'Iraqi style flourished was one of particularly
violent social and political upheaval in Iran. The style emerged around the
time of the Saljuq conquest, and was predominant during the conquests by
Chinggis Khan and Timur Lang. The turning away from public life, which is
evident in genres favoured by the style, and its cultivation of Sufism and
otherworldly concerns, can plausibly be linked to the period's intermittent
social and political chaos. The Mongol invasion destroyed centres of Sunm
orthodoxy, including its symbolic centre, the Baghdad caliphate, and the
resulting religious heterodoxy clearly favoured the growth of Sufism. A
related phenomenon, particularly noticeable in poets associated with Shlraz
(Sa c di, Hafiz, the scabrous 'Ubayd i ZakanT), is the recommendation to culti
vate a private life of hedonism away from centres of power, together with a

sharp eye for the hypocrisy of those in positions of either secular or religious
authority. Like the growth of Sufism, which it seems superficially to contra
diet, the often vigorous advocacy of religious scepticism by such authors can
be related to the period's social and religious uncertainties. One of the
distinctive qualities of Hafiz, for example, is his ability to suggest both Sufi
and religiously sceptical presuppositions simultaneously.

The time of the Mongol invasions also coincides with the internationalisa
tion of Persian as a literary medium. Sa'di boasted that his works were famous

421

beyond the confines of Iran, and whether or not this was strictly true in his
own lifetime it was certainly true very shortly afterwards, and the writings of
his contemporary Rumi in Turkey, and of the slightly younger Amir Khusraw
in India, attest to a flourishing Persian literary culture in both countries.
Persian literary models and criteria remained a source of inspiration in
Turkey for centuries to come, but no literature regarded as major in Persian
was produced there subsequent to Rumi's spectacular example; in the Mughal
empire, however, literary production in Persian was extensive, and by the late
tenth/ sixteenth and eleventh/seventeenth centuries it is arguable that more
poetry in Persian was being written in India than in Iran itself. From being an
expression of local irredentist ambitions, as it had been in the early Khurasan!
period, Persian literature had become an international, and internationally

emulated, enterprise.

Literature in the ninth/fifteenth century is dominated by the prolifically
fluent figure of Jam! (d. 898/1492), who consciously attempted to surpass
his
predecessors in most literary genres; thus his prosimetrum Baharistan is
an
attempt to outdo Sa'di's Gulistan, and his seven mathanawis were written
in
emulation of Nizami's five. The Sufi and allegorical structure of his
narratives
tends to eclipse almost entirely the relative realism, freshness and
psycho
logical acuity that had been Nizami's legacy from Gurgam. His two best
known mathnawis, Yusef wa Zulaykha and Salaman wa Absal, both use
the
figure of a beautiful young man whom an older woman attempts,
unsuccess
fully, to seduce, and while it is true that the texts superficially keep to the
heterosexual preoccupations established for mathnawis in previous
genera
tions, their florid descriptions of the chaste young protagonists' physical
beauty suggest a homoerotic subtext, together with a strongly implied
horror
of female sexuality. The romance, which in Gurgani's hands had
celebrated
heterosexual carnal love on its own terms, became a vehicle for spiritual
didacticism exhibiting a profound suspicion of the value of heterosexual
activity, and of female sexuality per se.

With the coming to power of the Shi'ite Safavid dynasty in 906/1501
Persian
society changed radically, and important elements of the metaphysical
and
theological preconceptions that had lain behind almost all Persian
literary
production for the previous six hundred years (often explicitly, often
merely as
a foil, but always there nevertheless) were relegated to a minor and quasi
heretical status. A poetry less given over to mystical speculation might
have
survived such theological changes relatively unchanged, but Persian
poetry
had by this time invested deeply in the spiritual, or at least the mystical,
as its
natural domain, and a rewriting of the Persian world's spiritual
boundaries

Persian literature

had an inevitably cautionary effect on literary production. A further significant
development is that painting had been increasing in prestige throughout the
Trmurid period, and the princes of the early Safavid court tended to give their
patronage to painters rather than to poets, with the result that many Persian
poets emigrated to the now flourishing Persian literary culture of India. These
spiritual and social changes meant that while literary activity did not, as earlier
scholars have often implied, become relatively worthless in Iran during the
Safavid period, it certainly faltered.

In Jamfs works, and even occasionally in those of Hafiz, hints of a new
aesthetic can be found, and these coalesced during the Safavid period to form
the Hindi/ Indian style. This style tends to value rhetorical complexity for its
own sake, and the poems written in it often deal with subjects previously
considered unlikely to be productive of interesting poetry. It also makes
originality of imagery a conscious and widely accepted criterion in Persian
poetry for the first time; if conventional tropes were used the poet was now
expected to give them some new and preferably startling twist. The style is
broadly comparable to that of the Gongorist poets and the Marinisti in
Europe, with which it is roughly contemporary. A number of poets produced
notable work in the Indian style, in both Iran and India; its undoubted master
is Sa'ib (d. 1087/1676), a major poet by any criteria, who deploys the rhetorical
resources of the style with great facility and charm, and whose works would

probably be read and studied much more had he not belonged to a period traditionally seen as lacking in significant literary production.

423

15

Turkish literature

CIGDEM BALIM HARDING

Introduction

The language(s) and literatures of Turkic peoples, spread over a large geo
graphy on the Silk Route, have been written with a variety of scripts over the
centuries. After they were introduced to Islam traditional Turkic (mostly oral)
literature and its forms and themes continued, while new literary forms and
lexicons were adopted from the Persian /Arabic Islamic traditions. The two
traditions did not exclude one another. At times they could have the same
audience, and sometimes the authors created in both traditions. The written
evidence of the pre Islamic literary tradition of the Turkic peoples, who were
latecomers to Islam, dates to the eighth century CE: the Orkhun inscriptions
in today's Mongolia. This is followed by manuscripts of Buddhist and
Manichaean religious literatures, which developed in the Tarim basin up to
the thirteenth century and were written in Uighur, Manichaean, Brahmin and
other scripts. Other information about Turkic literary forms and themes of

their literatures before Islam comes from Persian and Arabic sources as well as
Turkic sources in later centuries.

Upon becoming Muslims Turkic speaking peoples began to write with the Arabic script, as had other cultures that accepted Islam. Central Asia and eastern Iran (Bukhara, Samarqand, Herat, Kashghar) became centres
of learning, and Islamic schools (madrasas) educated them in Arabic and in the sciences of Islam, such as tafsir (exegesis or commentary of the Qur'an), hadith (oral traditions relating to the words and deeds of the Prophet) and fiqh (Islamic jurisprudence, which deals with the observance
of rituals and social legislation). The learned sections of the society studied
Arabic and Persian literature and literary forms as a part of their Islamic training, because by the time Turkic speaking peoples came onto the Islamic literary scene, Islamic Persian literature had a past of at least two
centuries.

424

Turkish literature

The beginnings

The first Islamic Turkic literary works, written in Arabic and Uighur scripts,
were developed in eastern Turkistan under the Qarakhanid dynasty (third seventh/ninth thirteenth centuries), which was the first Turkic dynasty to accept Islam as an official religion. The language used in the texts from this
period is close to old Uighur, with some Persian and Arabic lexical influence.
Kutadgu bilig (The wisdom of royal glory), the first noteworthy example of
Islamic Turkic literature, appeared around 461/1069. Written by an aristocrat
from Balasaghun named Yusuf Khass Hajib, this work is a poem in rhymed

couplets, of 6,645 lines divided into 85 chapters. The work is similar to other
Islamic works known as 'mirrors for princes'. The author gives advice on
morals and on administration through dialogues between statesmen, and tries
to answer the question of how one serves God better. The book advises
service and obedience not only to God but also to the established political
authority. Kutadgu bilig thus reflects the contemporary political debate
between those who, influenced by heterodox and Hellenistic ideas, ques
tioned the traditional order, and the orthodox Sufis, who tried to maintain
it. The newly Muslim Turkic speaking peoples found themselves participating
in this debate.

Meanwhile, the Turkic literature of the peoples continued in its tradi
tional forms and themes. Diwan lughat al Turk, a dictionary of the Turkic
languages compiled by Mahmud al Kashghari in 464 6/1072 4, gives infor
mation about the literatures and languages of the Turks together with
examples. It also contains an example of a poem written in the 'arud
metre for the first time as opposed to the syllabic metre of Turkic poetry.
In the work, al Kashghari displays a strong sense of Turkic identity and
attempts to refute negative Arab and Iranian discourses about Turkic
speaking peoples. He seeks to prove that Turkic and Arabic languages are
on an equal footing.

From these beginnings the Turkic peoples moved on to create their unique
literary synthesis. An early example is Adib Ahmad Yuknaki's didactic work,
'Atabet alhakalk (Threshold of the truth), of the sixth/twelfth century. It is
composed of 121 stanzas, which combine the Turkic linguistic form and
proverbial style with Islamic content. Yuknaki's readers must have accepted
that they were Turks and Muslims, and were comfortable using Turkic to
express Islamic ideas. This also is a book of wisdom giving moral advice but,
unlike Kutadgu bilig, it is written more for the masses and is more personal
rather than courtly in nature.

425

The New Cambridge History of Islam

The development of regional literatures

From the seventh/thirteenth century onwards various regional written lan
guages and literatures begin to appear among the Turkic speaking peoples.
Following the linguistic variation between Eastern and Western Turkic lan
guages in Central Asia, literature in Eastern Turkic comprises (i) literature in
Khwarazmian Turkic, which developed after the seventh/thirteenth century
as an extension of Qarakhanid Turkic; it carried the linguistic influences of
Oghuz and Qipchak Turkic, and was used as a literary language in the Golden
Horde; and (2) literature in Chaghatay Turkic between the ninth/fifteenth and
eleventh/seventeenth centuries, and which had its heyday during the Trmurid
empire (771 913/1370 1507). Although Chaghatay was based on Qarakhanid
and Khwarazmian linguistic traditions, it contained local lexical and syntactic
elements. In the west we see (1) the Qipchak Turkic language, documented by
Codex cumanicus (eighth/fourteenth century) which contains Turkic texts,
grammar, Latin, Persian and Turkic word lists, a Turkic German dictionary
compiled by Christian missionaries and translations, dictionaries and gram
mars composed in Egypt and Syria under the Mamluk dynasty (648 922/1250
1517); and (2) Oghuz Turkic, which is represented by Anatolian Turkish from
the fifth/ eleventh century onwards and which later developed into Ottoman
Turkish. Oghuz Turkic is also represented, from the ninth/ fifteenth century
onwards, by the Azerbaijani literary language, which developed as distinct
from Ottoman Turkish; and by the Turkmen literary language, which devel

oped from the eighth/fourteenth century onwards, although it was later subject to strong Chaghatay influence.

Eastern Turkic literatures

The Eastern Turkic language (Qarakhanid) developed into a literary language
in Turkistan, Khwarazm and the Golden Horde. We have manuscripts of prose, and poetry of religious nature by various authors. The Sufi poetry of
this period reached its best as plays on words with a multiplicity of meanings
and images. The forms were a series of quatrains (ruba'T), similar to the Turkic
koshug form with an aaba/ccdc rhyme scheme. However, Sufi poets mostly
used the ghazal form and the l amA quantitative metre, as opposed to the traditional Turkic accentual metres (counting syllables). Turkic oral style and
genres remained similar to earlier periods, and Persian and Arabic lexical borrowings were not used extensively. Oral tales, which are widespread among the Turks even today, relied on concrete images from real life and were expressed with short, concrete phrases. On the other hand, ghazals

426

Turkish literature

referred to Islamic figures and important religious places, and made use of
romantic classical epics /tales such as Farhad wa Shirin, Layla wa Majnun etc.
Mir c Ali Shir Nawal (844 906/1441 1501) is the central poet of the Central
Asian Islamic tradition. He composed thousands of ghazals and more than a
dozen other major literary works. Known as the founder of Chaghatay literary
language, he was a key figure in the Timurid cultural life of Herat and Samarqand. The Timurid ruler Zaher ud Drn Babur (888 937/1483 1530) wrote his memoirs, Baburnama (The book of Babur), a well known book

widely translated into other languages.

Western Turkic literatures

In the west, Mamluk Turkish literature is generally known as Qipchak
literature because the Volga Delta was populated largely by nomadic
Qipchak Turks, who as slaves provided the manpower of the Mamluk
armies
in Egypt and Syria. Translations from Arabic and Persian as well as
history
writing are among the most important works that the Mamluks left
behind.
During their rule of Egypt and Syria Mamluks played a crucial role in
enabling
the preservation and dissemination of important works of Turkic
literature.
For example, two of the oldest and most important works of Islamic
Turkish
literature, the Kutadgu bilig and the Diwan lughat al Turk, both
mentioned
above, were preserved in Mamluk libraries. After the fall of the Mamluk
sultanate in 923/1517 the libraries were moved to Istanbul, which had
great
impact on the literary scene of the Ottoman empire.

As for Anatolia, the first written examples of literature appear after
463/1071
following the settlement of the Oghuz tribes there. The literary works we
come across are representatives of mystical (Sufi) literature; folk
literature of a
religious mystical nature; and early examples of classical literature
{diwan).
The Saljuq state of Anatolia (469 706/1077 1307) used Arabic and
Persian as
state languages, Persian as the language of literature, and spoke Turkic
the rest
of the time. It is therefore important that after Shams al Din Mehmed
Beg of
Karaman captured Konya from the Saljuqs, he issued a decree in
675/1277 that
only Turkish should be used at home and at court.

During the Mongol invasions migration from Persia and Turkistan to
Anatolia intensified. Scholars, Sufis and dervishes of various sects came
to
Anatolia. Jalal al Din Rumi (d. 672/1273) settled in Konya, and introduced
not
only the conventions of classical Islamic literature, but also those of the

classical Sufi literature of the Mawlawi (Mevlevi) order. Some of his poetry
contains sections in Turkish. Among the other setders were the Sufis who
wrote in Turkic, such as Hajji Bektash Wall (seventh/thirteenth century) from

Khurasan, who laid the foundations of the Bektashi literature. This order was
later embraced by the Ottoman Janissary corps. During this period, nefes
(poetry sung to the musical accompaniment of the saz, a musical instrument),
became very popular among all peoples, as did the religious epics, which had
originated as oral epics during the period when the Turks conquered Anatolia
(late fifth/ eleventh century). Alongside this folk literature we increasingly see
a new type of literature, incorporating 'arud and the forms of classical Islamic
literature. The main representatives are Sultan Walad (623 712/1226 1312), the
son of RumI, whose works are in Persian but contain couplets in Turkish;
Giilsehri (d. after 717/1317), A.siq Pasa (670 733/1272 1333) and the Hurufipoet
Nesrmi (d. 820/1417^, whose Turkish dlwan played a major role in
the development of Azeri poetry. Yunus Emre (d. c. 720/1320), whose post
humously collected diwan is the first one written in Anatolian Turkish, is well
loved to this day. Works attributed to Yunus are seen as the best examples of
'mystical folk literature' in Turkish. Qaygusuz Abdal (eighth ninth/four
teenth fifteenth centuries) is another important representative of this genre.
He wrote both in syllabic metre and in 'arud, using both Turkic and Islamic

poetic forms. The mawlid of Siileyman Celebi (d. 832/1429), which narrates the
Prophet's birth, mfraj and death, in Turkish, is still recited as a vital part of
Muslim prayers at home and at mosques in Turkey.

During the early eighth/fourteenth century, following the decline of the
Saljuq state in Anatolia, centres of the begtiks such as Konya, Kiitahya and
Antalya became centres of literary activity. Since the rulers spoke and encour
aged Turkic, the poets and writers produced in Turkic with confidence. When
the Ottomans became dominant among the begliks, the centre of literary
activity moved with them, and finally ended up in Istanbul. Hence the
Turkic literature that was produced in the Ottoman empire is referred to as
Ottoman Turkish literature.

An important characteristic of the eighth/fourteenth and ninth/fifteenth
centuries was the intensive translation movement from Arabic and Persian
texts. In order to bring Islamic culture to a wider audience, works in every
field of Islamic learning and practice were translated into simple and clear
Turkish. These were works about the basic principles of worship and
conduct within the family and the community; interlinear translations of the
Qur'an and of tafsir, stories of prophets, legends of saints etc.; encyclopaedic
manuals on medicine and drugs, on geography, astronomy and interpretation
of dreams; music treatises and dictionaries were also translated. Love stories in
mathnawi format were translated, as were mystical mathnawis, but these were
not so much translated as adapted by Turkish writers, who added their own

428

Turkish literature

phrases and commentaries, and made 'improvements'. The translations were
usually longer than the originals. Among the well known works translated
were Khusraw wa Shirin by Nizaml (b. 535 or 540/1141 or 1146) and the
Shahnama of Firdawsi (d. 411/ 1020).

Also during the ninth/fifteenth century twelve heroic stories of the Oghuz
tribes in eastern Anatolia and Azerbaijan dating from the sixth/twelfth cen
tury were collected and written down as the Kitab 1 Dede Korkut (Book of Dede
Korkud). The Ottomans admired the art and literature of the Timurid court
deeply. At the cultural centres of Samarqand and Herat the Uighur alphabet
was used side by side with Arabic script in literary texts, and just like the
Central Asian Turkish court, the Ottoman sultan Murad II (r. 824 48, 850 5/
1421 44, 1446 51) kept secretaries at his court in Edirne capable of composing
fermans (firman: royal mandate or decree) in the Uighur alphabet. Even in later
days the Ottoman fermans were composed in Chaghatay and written down
in both Arabic and Uighur scripts. Ottoman poets and intellectuals took
great interest in Chaghatay and Persian literature. Many went to Central
Asia even as late as the eleventh/ seventeenth century to get a good education,
and scholars and scientists from these lands were highly respected by the
Ottomans.

Maturation of regional literatures

From the tenth/ sixteenth century onwards we witness distinct literary Ian
guages and literary works. Chaghatay in its middle or late Chaghatay form
continued as the major literary language in the east. However, it began to be
strongly influenced by local traditions and regional spoken varieties of Turkic
in eastern Turkistan, in the khanate of Qazan, and among the Turkmens.
Chaghatay was later called Turk! in eastern Turkistan, the Volga region and
the Crimea. Oghuz in Anatolia developed into Ottoman Turkish, and as a

literary language it was used in a variety of styles and forms. Meanwhile, a
literary Azerbaijani language developed; Qipchak Turkic vanished as a major
literary language, and smaller languages such as Karaim and Armeno Qipchak
developed written forms.

Eastern Turkish literatures

Well known examples of Turkic literature in Central Asia in the eleventh/
seventeenth century are works by ruler and literary figure Abu al Ghazi
Bahadur Khan, two genealogies with mythological elements: Shajare i
Tarakime (1070/1659), the genealogical tree of the Turkmen, and Shajare i

Turk (1076/ 1665), the genealogical tree of the Turks. This latter work is a
history of the Shaybanid dynasty and was completed by his son.

During the twelfth/ eighteenth century in Central Asia Turkic poets fol
lowed the classical tradition established by the Chaghatay poets, but with
increasing regional influence. By the end of the twelfth/eighteenth and during
the thirteenth/nineteenth century eastern Turkistan had local poets with
local followings. From the second half of the thirteenth/ nineteenth century
written regional languages began to emerge, eventually replacing Chaghatay.
For example, the Tatars developed a written norm which was closer to
spoken Qazan Tatar, and until the fourteenth/twentieth century Ottoman,
Azerbaijani, Uzbek and Tatar written languages and literatures dominated the
region.

Western Turkic literatures

In the west, Ottoman literature of the ninth tenth/ fifteenth sixteenth centur
ies reflected the self confidence of the Ottomans as a world power. The literary language became full of idioms and word play; the poets were comfortable and self confident in their use of the language both in poetry and prose. The qasida or ode became fashionable, and every poet of signifi
cance had to compose qasidas for the sultan and high dignitaries. An early
Anatolian poet is the Hurufi NesTmi (d. c. 820/1417). Nawa'i (844 906/ 1441 1501) and Mihri Khatun (d. 917/1506), the best known female Ottoman
poet, are contemporaries.

Among the well known names are Baki (d. 1008/ 1600) and Fudull (d. 963/
1556). Baki's qasidas for Siileyman and his successors, Murad III (d. 1003/1595)
and Mehmed III (d. 1011/1603), are well known. His dxwan reflects his intelli
gence and his skill in handling poetic form and content. Fudull, a poet from
Baghdad, wrote in Azeri Turkish, but is regarded as both an Ottoman and an
Azeri poet. This is not controversial since the two dialects were very close at
the time. Sultan Siileyman the Magnificent (d. 973/1566) himself wrote quite
successful poetry. Lami'i Cdebi (877 938/1472 1532), a scholar and a poet, is
also well known for his translations of major Persian narrative poems into Turkish.

In the tenth/ sixteenth century mathnawl was still a very popular genre. An
increasing number of poets wrote love tales as well as on mystical and religious subjects using this form. Azeri poet Nizarms (d. 606/1209) khamse
(collection of five mathnawis) was seen as an example to be followed by the
Ottoman poets. The poets of the time are known for their use of Sufi terminology to express personal emotions. For example, the famous mathnawl

430

Turkish literature

Dastan i Leyli vii Mejnim (The epic of Layla and Majnun) of Fuduli has a mystical atmosphere, even though it is a story of platonic but worldly love.
In the tenth/ sixteenth century the Ottomans came into closer contact with the
Western world, and the impressions of this contact were reflected in the diaries of Ottoman slaves and soldiers who escaped captivity in the West.

In time, although they did not abandon the traditional and classical topics,
Ottoman poets moved towards more worldly pursuits. The themes of their
poetry became more and more representative of real life, and their subjects
were chosen from their immediate vicinity and from among their human contemporaries. Some researchers call this the 'localisation movement' (mahaEikftne), which continued well into the eleventh/seventeenth and twelfth/eighteenth centuries and found its best voice in Nedlm (d. 1143/ 1730). The most interesting feature of the period is the popularity of public
performance. Although the tradition of the storyteller who recited religious
heroic stories in public was not new, now tales of unusual events happening to
characters taken from everyday life were told. Also, the court always had storytellers but in this period they were educated persons, sometimes the sultan's personal courtiers. The eleventh /seventeenth century is the period
when local colour dominates Ottoman literature. Poets are plentiful and very
productive. There are hundreds ofdiwans left from this period in the libraries.
While Nef 1 (d. 1044/ 1635) makes a name for himself with his qasldas (poems of
praise) Nabi (d. 1124/ 1712) excels with his lyrics filled with popular sayings and
verses commemorating important occasions. Mystical poetry was also plenti
fill, and mathnawl poets created works on many topics; meanwhile, the folk
minstrel Karajaoglan (d. 1090/1680) sang his love poems, still enjoyed today, in

traditional Turkic forms. The language of the prose shows a large variety, from adorned language to simple, almost everyday spoken expression, and biographies and literary histories were favourite genres. Perhaps the most famous of all prose writers is Evliya Celebi (1019 92/1611 82) with his ten volumes of travel diaries of the Ottoman lands, the Seyahatname. Reality is mixed with exaggeration and myth, but they reflect the incredible landscape, variety of the peoples of the Ottoman empire and their customs. The learned Katib Celebi (Hajji Khalifa, 1017 67/1609 57) is another important figure who wrote books on history, geography, society and literature. In the eleventh/ seventeenth century traditional Turkish theatre, orta oyunu (folk theatre accompanied by music) as well as the performances of the shadow play or Karagoz became very popular.

During the twelfth/ eighteenth century Ottoman diwan poets used the Turkic syllabic metre as well as the 'amd. Famous poets such as Nedim and

431

§eykh Ghalib (1170 1219/1757 99) were among these. Nedlrn's ghazals and sarkis (poems which can be composed into songs) are a symbol of the period known in Ottoman history as the Tulip Era. His subjects were original, and language reflected his rich imagination. Ghalib's mathnawi Hiisn ii a§k (Beauty and love), allegorical in nature, is one of the most important works of Turkish

literature. In prose, the sefaret name (embassy memoirs) such as the Fransa
sefaret namesi (French embassy memoirs) of Yirmisekiz Celebi Mehmed
Efendi, described foreign lands; the sur names were written to celebrate the
festivals held by the sultans; and more poets wrote biographies than ever
before.

The introduction of printing

Throughout the centuries discussed here, Turkic folk literature continued in
its variety of traditional formats and was enjoyed by everyone. These forms
include poetry, epics and tales, legends, proverbs, riddles, sung poems etc.
Certain items of folk tradition were also a part of the written tradition, such as
epics of all kinds. It should also be remembered that in the Ottoman empire
many languages were spoken, but until the nineteenth century only some
were written: Ottoman Turkish, Arabic, Persian, Greek, Armenian and
Hebrew. Turkish speaking Greek Orthodox (Qaraman) and Armenians read
especially Turkish folk literature written in Greek or Armenian characters and
contributed to the literary scene.

The development of the printing press in the twelfth/ eighteenth century
needs special mention. The printing press had been introduced into the
empire during the reign of Bayazid II (r. 886 918/1481 1512) by non Muslim
subjects Christians (Armenians and Greeks), and Jews after their expulsion
from Spain in 897/1492. Non Muslim minorities were allowed to publish
works in their own languages, but printing in Arabic letters was not permitted
for the Muslims. The first books, primarily grammars and dictionaries and
phrase books in Turkish, were printed in western European countries, and,
since no Turkish press existed, they were imported. The reasons for absten
tion from printing, which had an enormous negative impact on the future of
the empire, included religious conservatism and protection of the social and
economic interests of the professions of calligraphers, illustrators,
binders etc.,

the people who produced the books. Although the first book only appeared in
1141/ 1729, the first printing press was established in 1140/ 1727, by Ibrahim
Miiteferriqa (d. 1157/1745), a diplomat and literary figure who managed to
convince the court of the benefits of printing. Sultan Ahmed III authorised him

432

Turkish literature

to print books only on practical subjects such as medicine, crafts and geo
graphical guides, but nothing religious in nature. However, printing did not
take off immediately, and printed books were not popular. The printing press,
after changing hands, closed down in 1211/ 1797. In its sixty four years of
existence it had printed only twenty four books, the last book appearing in
1209/1794. During the same period the late 1190/1780S and early 1200/1790S
the French Embassy Press published four books. Later on, several printing
presses were opened and these were more successful. The first newspaper,
Taqvimi vekayi, was published by the Taqvrmhane i Amire in 1246 /1831,
followed by its French version, Le Moniteur ottoman.

433

Urdu literature

SHAMSUR RAHMAN FARUQI

In 1111/ 1700 there came to Delhi a man whose takhallus (pen name) was Wall;
his real name is a matter of dispute. Wall was born in 1075/1665 or 1077/1667,
and almost certainly died in 1119 20/1707 8. The first account of his advent in
Delhi is from the tadhkira (biographical dictionary of poets) Nikat al shu c ara'
(Finer points concerning the poets, c. 1165/ 1752) by Muhammad Taqi MTr
(1135 1225/1723 1810), the second from Makhzan i nikat (c. 1169/1756), another
tadhkira, by Qa'im Chandpuri (1137 i209/i724f 95). This is what they say about Wall:

[Wall] is from Aurangabad. It is said that he came to Delhi too and presented
himself before Miyan Shah Gulshan and recited [before him] some verses of
his own. Miyan Sahib observed, 'There are all those Persian themes lying
unused; bring them into use in your own Rekhta; 1 who is there to challenge
you if you do this?' 2

In the forty fourth regnal year of King Alamgir, he [Wall] came to
Jahanabad, 3 accompanied by . . . Abu al Ma'ali . . . He used occasionally to
compose a verse in Persian, praising Abu al Ma'alfs beauty. On arrival here
[in Delhi], when he had the auspicious occasion to present himself before
Hadrat Shaykh Sa'd al Lah Gulshan, may his grave be hallowed, he com
manded him to compose poetry in Rekhta, and by way of education, gave
away to him the following opening verse that he composed:

Were I to set down on paper

The praises of the beloved's beauty,

I would spontaneously

Convert the paper into the White Hand

Of Moses.

1 This was one of the many names used for Urdu at that time. The word Urdu came into
use as a language name much later.

2 Muhammad Taqi Mir, Nikat al shu'ara', ed. Mahmud Ilahi (New Delhi 1972 [1752]), p. 91.

3 One of the popular names for Delhi at that time.

434

Urdu literature

In sum, it was due to the fortunate presaging by the saint's tongue that ... he
wrote Rekhta with such expressive power and grace that most of the Masters
of that time began deliberately to compose verses in Rekhta. 4

Ignoring the inconsistency between the two accounts, it only needs to be
pointed out that both stress the Delhi origin of Wall's poetry, which became
so popular that master poets in Delhi began to compose in Wall's mode: but
for the Delhi saint's advice to him, Wall would have remained an occasional
poet in Persian, or a negligible poet in Rekhta. Although the two accounts do
not match and were recorded much after the event, Wall undeniably trans
formed Urdu poetry. Ghulam Hamadani Mushafi (1163 1239/ 1750 1824)
reported an eyewitness account of Shah Hatim (1110 97/1699 1783), a major
Delhi poet:

One day he [Shah Hatim] mentioned to this faqir that in the second regnal

year of him who rests in Paradise [Emperor Muhammad Shah, r. 1719 48]
Wall's dlwan arrived in Shahjahanabad, 5 and its verses became current on the
tongues of young and old.

Historians of Urdu literature, while crediting Wall with having revolutionised
Urdu poetry, have maintained that it became possible only because Wall came
to Delhi and learned his literary savoir faire from a Delhi based master. The
interpretation that Wall's role in the development of Urdu poetry was in fact
Delhi inspired has been challenged by some scholars, but seems still to occupy
its authoritative position.

There was very little Urdu literature in the north before Wall Mas'ud Sa c d
Salman of Lahore (437 514/1046 1121) is reputed to have produced a diwan in
Hindi or Hindvi. It no longer exists. ArnTr Khusraw of Delhi (650 725/1253
1325) reports having 'presented to friends a few quires of [my] Hindvi verse
too'. 7 Nothing of those verses exists now. Urdu literature in the north never
really began before the eleventh/ seventeenth century, and did not take off
until the advent of Wall. Khusraw's poetics and literary theory must have
influenced Urdu poets, but his Hindvi poetry did no such thing.

After Khusraw there are only two prominent names: Muhammad Afdal
(d. 1034/ 1625), who left a longish poem called Bikat kaharii (A dire tale), and

4 Qa'im Chandpuri, Makhzan i nikat, ed. Iqtida Hasan (Lahore, n.d. [c. 1756]), pp. 21 3.

5 Another popular name for Delhi at that time.

6 Ghulam Hamadani Mushafi, Tadhkira yi Hindi, ed. 'Abd al Haq (Aurangabad, 1933 [1794 5]), p. 80.

7 Amir Yamin al Din Khusraw, Dtbacha i ghurrat al kamal, ed. Wazir Hasan Abidi (Lahore,
1975 [1294]), P- 63-

Mir Ja c far Zatalli (1068? 1125/1658? 1713), long neglected by literary historians
for his savage, pornographic satires. Afdal wrote almost entirely in the rekhta
mode. Rekhta was the name of the language then also known as Hindi, Hindvl, Gujri and Dakani, and later known as Urdu. It was also a genre, a macaronic verse where Hindi /Hindvl or Rekhta (language) was freely mixed
with Persian in different proportions. Zatalli wrote some of his poetry and one
small piece of prose in plain Hindi. The rest is in the rekhta mode and genre.

Around 1133/1720 Delhi seems suddenly to have been full of Urdu poets: Shah Mubarak Abru (1094/7 1145/1683/5 1733), Sharaf al Din Madmun (d. 1146/1734L), Sadr al Din Fa'iz (1101 50/1690 i737f), Ahsan al Lah Ahsan
(d. ii5o/i737f), Muhammad Shakir Naji (1101? 57/607/1690? 1744/7?), MTrza
Mazhar Jan i Janan (1110 95/1699 1781) and Shah Hatim (1110 97/1699 1783),
to mention only the most prominent. Some of them had been exclusively or
mainly Persian poets, and had switched to Urdu later. The inference is inescapable that while the soil must have been extremely rich, it was Wall
who provided the seed through his diwan, which reached Delhi in 1720.

The Urdu literary environment in Delhi benefited by the presence of Siraj al Din 'All Khan i Arzu (1100 69/1689 1756) who was a Persian poet, linguist,
critic and lexicographer. For Urdu poets he was a literary philosopher and

mentor. Even senior Urdu poets such as Abru gathered around him for
instruction. Prose made an appearance in the Delhi area with Fadl i 'All
Fad
li, who prepared the first version of his Karbal hatha (The story of
Karbala), a
religious text, around 1143 5/1731 2.

The questions why there was almost no Urdu literature in the north
before
the twelfth/ eighteenth century, and why and when the language came to
be
called 'Urdu' have not engaged much attention. The latter question was
first
discussed, somewhat inadequately, by Grahame Bailey (1872 1942). A
little
later Mahmud Sheranl (1888 1945) made extensive observations on the
fact
that the word 'Urdu' as a language name was of recent use, but did not
go into
the historical and linguistic implications of the phenomenon. 9 John
Gilchrist
(1759 1841) was almost the first to observe that 'Rekhtu [Rekhta]' was a
'mixed
dialect, also called Oordoo or the polished language of the Court' 10 and
thus
provide a clue to the origin of the name: urdu means 'royal court or
camp',
and the language began to be called zaban i urdu i rmColla or 'the
language of

8 T. Grahame Bailey, Studies in North Indian languages (London, 1938),
pp. 1, 3, 6.

9 Hafiz Mahmud Sheranl, Maqalat i Sheranl, ed. Mazhar Mahmud
Sheranl, 7 vols. (Lahore,
1966 76), vol. I, pp. 10 44.

10 Dr John B. Gilchrist, A grammar of the Hindoostanee language, or
part third of volume first, of
a system of Hindoostanee philology (Calcutta, 1796), p. 261.

Urdu literature

the Exalted Court' some time in the late 1770s after Emperor Shah c Alam
(r. 1759 1806) returned to Delhi in 1772 and took up residence in the Red Fort.
There is evidence to suggest that the term zaban i urdu i mu^alla was previ
ously used for Persian."

Persian may have delayed Urdu's emergence as a literary language in the
north. Urdu literature originated in early ninth/ fifteenth century Gujarat and
Deccan through the Sufis, who interacted with the people in the local
language, variously called Dihlavi, Hindi, Hindvi, Gujri or Dakam. In and
around Delhi at about that time Persian seems to have been very nearly the
koine, if not the lingua franca. So the Sufis there used Persian almost as a local
language.

Literary activity on a viable scale began in Gujarat with the Sufi poetry of
Shaykh Baha] al Din Bajan (790 911/ 1388 1506), who composed meditative,
song like poems in a genre called jikri apparently from dhikr (remembering,
speaking (of God)). He was followed by a host of Sufi and then some
non Sufi poets, including Shaykh Khub Muhammad Chishti (945 1022/
1539 1614) whose long poem sequence Khub tarang (Waves or exuberant
imaginings of Khub /Excellent waves, 985/1578) is a great poem as well as a
Sufi tract. Space permits naming only some of the major Urdu poets from
Gujarat up to 1800: Qadi Mahmud Daryal (822 940/1419 1534), Shaykh 'All
Muhammad Jiv Gamdham (d. 972/1565), 'Alam Gujrati (fl. 1080S/1670S), Amrn
Gujrati (fl. 1100S/1690S), Raja Ram (late eleventh/ seventeenth century), and
Abd al Wall c Uzlat (1103 88 / 1692/3 1775), who was only the second poet from
Gujarat after Wall to have his work recognised in the north.

The language of these poets was originally called Dihlavi. The name
changed to Gujri, and remained so until about the first half of the twelfth/

eighteenth century, when the name Hindi seems to have supervened. Themes
were mostly Sufistic didactic, with occasional sections praising Gujarat and
the Sufi masters. One exception was Khub Muhammad Chishti, who wrote a
verse tract on Persian and Sanskrit prosody called Chhand chhandan (Metre and
metres) and another on figures of speech called Bhao bhed (Discernment of
meaning). The first is an attempt to synthesise Sanskrit and Persian prosody.
The other defines the figures of speech in Persian and Gujri, followed by
examples from Gujri. It is likely that Chishti' s ideas influenced the Deccam
king Muhammad Qui! Qutb Shah (r. 1580 1611), who was the first Urdu poet to
put together an Urdu diwan of his own.

11 Siraj al Din 'Ah Khan Arzu, Muthmir, ed. Raihana Khatun (Karachi, 1991 [c. 1747]), p. 32.

During its Dakani Gujri phase the language shows an abundance of
Sanskritic words drawn from modern North or South Indian languages,
many of which are no longer recognisable as Urdu; old Urdu words based
on Arabic and Persian, many of which are now obsolete; and a generous
sprinkling of Persian and Arabic words. There is a comparative lack of idioms
and proverbs, which form a significant component of the Delhi register until
the nineteenth century. The syntax is clearly Urdu. As the language passes into
its Hindi/ Rekhta mode, it gradually becomes closer to the Delhi register of

the early eighteenth century, shedding more words derived from neighbour
ing dialects such as Braj Bhasha.

DiHavi/ Hindi/ Hindvi may have travelled south with the great exodus
from Delhi forced by Muhammad Tughlaq in 1327. Sayyid Muhammad
Gesu Daraz (721 825/1321 1422) accompanied his father to the Deccan in
1327. He returned to Delhi in 1337, but went back in 1398 to settle in
Gulbarga in modern Karnataka. Though Hindvi literary works originally
attributed to him are now known to be of later date, he must have used
Dihlavi/ Hindi for his discourses, and there was plenty of literary activity
in the
Deccan from his successors and followers. His presence, and also that of
numerous secular and religious notables who settled in the south, must
have caused the language to spread through the territories that now form
parts of Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka and Maharashtra. Some speakers of the
language must also have come from Gujarat, because native South India born
writers too have described their language as Gujri. One example is the work of
the Sufi Shah Burhan al Din Janam (d. 990?/i582?).

The first known Urdu literary product from the Deccan is a long mathnavi
of more than 4,000 lines. It does not show any Sufi influences. Only one
manuscript exists, and the poem has been internally dated between 1421 and
1434. The manuscript is incomplete, so the poem must have been longer. It has
no name and has been labelled Kadam Rao Padam Rao after its chief characters.
The author's name has been determined as Fakhr i Din Nizami. He is not a
better poet than Bajan, but he wrote his poem in a regular Persian metre,
while Bajan almost exclusively employed indigenous, folky metres. Although
according to Sayyida Ja c far 'the idioms and proverbs used by Nizami are with
some changes still well understood and spoken in the rural Deccan', 12 Kadam
Rao Padam Rao is extremely hard to follow because Nizami' s language is full of
words derived from many South Indian languages, and also Sanskrit.

12 Gyan Chand and Sayyida Ja'far, Tankh i adah i Urdu, sattarah saw tak, 5 vols. (New Delhi,
1998), vol. I, p. 14.

Urdu literature

Jamil Jalibi even finds traces of Panjabi, Saraiki and Sindhi in Kadam Rao Padam Rao, and says that, despite this medley of languages, the syntax of the
poem is clearly Urdu. 13 Sayyida Ja'far believes that it could not have been the
first poem of its kind. 14 The poet's handling of both metre and theme has a
maturity that only experience of similar poetry engenders.

Shah Miran ji Shams al Ushshaq (809 903/1407 98) came to India in the 1450s and somewhat unwillingly adopted Dakani for imparting Sufi thought
and instruction to the people. The twelfth/ sixteenth and thirteenth/ seven
teenth centuries saw the rise and the apogee of Urdu literature in the Deccan.
The breakup (1483 1518) of the Bahmanid empire into five kingdoms appa
rently benefited literary growth by creating more centres of patronage and
economic development. At least three kings stand out as poets. The non ghazal poetry of Muhammad Qull Qutb Shah is marked by a lively interest
in local customs and festivals. His ghazals are often lighdy erotic and full of
the jouissance and ecstasy of love. Ibrahim Adil Shah II (r. 1580 1626) was
passionately interested in music, and compiled Kitab i nawras (The book of
nine essences/The newly matured book, before 1008/1600), a collection of
songs and poems to be set to music. 'Ali 'Adil Shah Shahi (r. 1638 74) left a fine

diwan of Urdu ghazals.

Miran ji's son Shah Burhan al Din Janam wrote abstract Sufi tracts in
prose and verse. Hasan Shawqi's (947? 1042/ 1541? 1633) ghazal
influenced
Wali, perhaps because of its sensuousness. Janam's son Arnin al Din c Ali
A'la
(1007? 1085/ 1599? 1675) wrote better prose than his father on Sufi
themes.
Shay kh Ahmad Gujarati(b. c. 945/1539) came to Hyderabad at the
invitation of
Muhammad Quli Qutb Shah and wrote Yusuf Zulaikha, a long romantic
mathnavi, during 987 96/1580 5. He devoted many verses to discussion
on
what good poetry is, and how he trained and educated himself before
embarking upon a poetic career.

Mulla Waj] hi (or sometimes Wajihi, d. c. 1069/ 1659 or 1081/1671)
celebrated
Muhammad Quli Qutb Shah's love affair in a long mathnavi called Qutb
Mushtari (Qutb and Mushtari, 1017/ 1609), which rivals the king's work
in
depicting erotic themes and moments. He followed this up nearly half a
century later with Sab ras (The essence of all, 1065 7/1655 6), one of the
most enduring prose allegories in Urdu literature. Waj'hi also made
interest
ing points of literary theory in Qutb Mushtari.

13 Jamil Jalibi, Tankh i adab i Urdu, 3 vols. (Delhi, 1977 2007), vol. I, pp.
25, 38.
14 Chand and Ja'far, Tarikh, p. 14.

439

Mulla Nusrati Bijapurf s (1008 84/1600 74) 'AS nama ('All's book, c.
1080/

1670), is a long mathnavi that contains a qaslda at the head of each section. It
celebrates the military campaigns of 'All 'Adil Shah II, and is the most power
ful razm poem in Urdu, just as Hasan Shawqi created in Mezbdni nama (The
book of hospitality, c. 1040S/1630S) the best bazm poem in the language. 15
Nusrati also produced a mathnavi called Gubhan i Hshq (Love's garden, 1068/
1658). To Nusrati should also go the credit of introducing perhaps the most
far reaching concept in Urdu literary theory: a distinction between ma'm
(meaning) and madman (theme). This enabled poets to look for new themes
and construct literary utterances that meant more than they seemed to say.
The influence of Sanskrit literary thought on this development cannot be
ruled out.

Hashimi Bijapurf (d. 1108 / 1697) wrote a long love mathnavi to which he gave
the plain name of Mathnavi i Hshqiya (A love mathnavi), with a delightful
double plot involving the king of Kashmir and the great Persian poet Sa'di
(609? 91/1213? 92). Hashimi's greatest claim to fame is in the fact that in his
ghazals the speaker is almost invariably female; she is beautiful and seductive
in her own right, but she is the lover, and her beloved is male. This is not
uncommon in ghazals up to the late eleventh/ seventeenth century, but
Hashimi uses the device with an erotic panache and verve which suggests
that he in some way adopted the female voice as his own rather than just
observing a convention.

The Dakani impulse was played out by the mid twelfth/ eighteenth cen
tury. The cultural authority of the Delhi register of language, and of the
Persianate (or, in modern parlance, the sabk i hindi or 'Indian style') mode
introduced by Wall are the two main reasons for this. Mawlana Baqar
Agah (1158 1220/ 1745 1806), the last great figure in pre modern Dakani
Urdu, wrote in both modes, and lamented that while the Delhi poet Sawda
(1117 95/1706 81) was known from 'Hind to Karnatak', the greatness of
Nusrati was not recognised. 1 Lachhmi Nara'in Shafiq Awrangabadi (1158
1222/ 1745 1808) wrote that he was obliged, against his inclination, to leave

Persian in favour of Rekhta because of the latter's great popularity. 17 The

15 Razm, (lit. 'combat') in literary terms means a descripton of battles and conquests; bazm
(lit. '(colourful) assembly') in literary terms means a description of wine drinking,
dancing, singing, love.

16 Mawlana Baqar Agah, 'Preface to Gulzar i 'Ishq' (1794) in 'Alim Saba Navidi (ed.),
Mawlana Baqar Agah He adabl navadir (Madras, 1994), pp. 144 5. Kamataka (Karnatak in
Urdu) was the medieval name of modern day Tamil Nadu.

17 Lachhmi Nara'in Shafiq Awrangabadi, Chamanistan i shu'ara', ed. and trans. 'Ata Kakvi
(Patna, 1968 [1762]), p. 9.

440

Urdu literature

poetry of Siraj Awrangabadi (1126? 77/1714? 63/4), who never took a step
northward and wrote like the poets of Delhi, only better, proves Shafiq's point.

If Wall took Delhi by storm, Delhi took the rest of the Urdu world by storm, and very soon became the chief seat of Urdu literature. Only a hint can
be given here of the main things that happened.

The distinction between meaning and theme (ma'ni and madmun) was exploited further. The search for new, even outre themes (madmun afirini,
that is, creating new themes), and verbal structures with multiple meanings

(ma'nl bandi, or depicting meanings) became important in poetry. Wordplay
and sophisticated or playful double entendre or iham became extremely
popular. Here again, the influence of Sanskrit poetics cannot be ruled
out.
Marginal genres such as ruba.% aita, marsiya and verse chronogram
were
refined. New genres such as the shahr ashob (poems lamenting the
decline of
order, and of professional classes or the world turning upside down), and
wasokht (the lover's complaint) were introduced. Autobiographical
poems or
poems depicting personal experiences were popular. Humour, satire,
scurri
lous and adversarial poems achieved stunning heights. Themes of homo
sexuality or boy love became common, more so in some poets than in
others. There had been no humour, satire or homosexuality in Gujri or
Dakarii.

Creative language became bolder and more colourful. The ghazal became
more inward looking and also more aware of the world. Prose began to
be
employed for literary discourse, Qur'anic translation, history and
romance.
This prose was without verbose embellishments, much like the prose
later
propagated at the College of Fort William. Mention must be made here of
Shah Murad al Lah Sambhalf s partial translation and commentary on the
Qur] an called Tafsiri Muradiyya (1184/ 1771), Qissa wa ahwali Ruhela
(The
story and circumstances of the Rohillas, 1189/ 1776) by Rustam 'All
Bijnori,
and the unfinished though still voluminous 'AjaHb al qisas (The most
wonder
ful of all tales, 1206/ 1792) by Shah 'Alam. The names of two other
historians,
Hari Har Parshad Sambhali and Bindraban Mathravi, also appear; but
nothing
else is known of them.

The new Urdu literary community in Delhi was extremely self aware.
Tadhkiras, initially in Persian, and then from 1801 in Urdu also, were
written
in large numbers. They included as many contemporary poets as
possible,
with the occasional polemical or critical comment and literary or
biographical
anecdote thrown in. While Sufis, noblemen and royalty continued to be
active

in poetry, the entry to the poets' ranks of women and professionals from

The New Cambridge History of Islam

non elite classes was the new phenomenon. Hindus, who had previously
concentrated on Persian, now turned to Urdu. The first great Hindu names
in Urdu poetry date from this time, Sarb Sukh Divana (1139? 1202/1727? 88/9)
being the most notable among them. The society became more conscious of
poetry as a worthwhile activity.

The first female poet with a diwan of her own was Mah Laqa Chanda (1181
1235/ 1768 1820), a 'nautch girl' of great beauty and wealth in Hyderabad.
Another notable female poet was Gunna Begam (d. 1186/1773), who was the
daughter of a famous Iranian poet and was married to 'Imad al Mulk, one time
prime minister to Emperor Ahmad Shah. Hayat al Nisa Begam, a daughter of
Shah 'Alam, was also a poet. Europeans appear on the literary scene in the last
years of the twelfth/ eighteenth century.

With so many newcomers and with so little in the history to provide
models, it was natural that aspirants should turn to the knowledgeable for
advice. The institution of ustad and shagird (master and pupil) thus came into
existence, and was well in place by the 1760s in Delhi and elsewhere. Chanda
had Sher Muhammad Khan Iman, a Delhi poet, as her ustad.

Muhammad Taqi Mir (1135 1125/ 1723 1810) was perhaps the greatest Urdu

poet, and certainly the greatest of the twelfth/ eighteenth century. His poetry
has the same fullness and variety that marked his century, though
his reputation seems to have rested generally on unauthenticated anecdotes
presenting him as a self regarding, curmudgeonly individual. There are
moods of extreme sadness in his poetry, but there are also the joys of love
and life, Sufistic ideas presented with unsurpassable grace and puissance,
satire, humour (which could be bawdy or directed against himself), and a
miraculous feel for words.

Mir went to Lucknow in 1196/ 1782, and spent his life there in reasonable
comfort. Mirza Muhammad Raft 1 Sawda and Sayyid Muhammad Mir Soz
(1132 i2i3/i72of. 98f) had preceded him there. According to an anecdote
MTr declared that there were only two full poets, himself and Sawda, and
one half poet, Sayyid Khwaja Mir Dard (1134 99/1722 85). When asked about
Soz he scowled, 'Okay, so let the number of poets be two and three quarters/
The story, if true, reflects not so much MTr's egotism as a critical judgement:
Sawda was an excellent poet, equally at home in all the genres of Urdu poetry.
Dard was excellent too, but he had nothing to offer in qaslda and maihnavl, two
of the triumvirate of the genres, so he was only half a poet. Soz, plainly, wasn't
in the same class as the other three.

These judgements have more or less abided. But there were many
other meritorious poets with fine contemporary reputations: 'Abd al Hayy

442

Urdu literature

Taban (1127 62/1715 49); In c am al Lah Khan Yaqin (1139? 68/1727? 55);

Mir Athar (1148 1208/1735E 94); Mir Hasan (1148 1200/1736^ 86); and Nazir

Akbarabadi (1152 1245/1740 1830), whom S. W. Fallon compared to Chaucer

and Shakespeare. 1 Shah Hatim, Qa'im Chandpuri, Divana and Mushafi have

already been mentioned. By 1168/ 1755 Hatim was claiming that he wrote in

the language of the mirzas (gentlemen) and rinds (liberal bons vivants) of Delhi.

He is credited with launching the so called Islah i Zaban (language reform)

movement. While there was in fact no such movement, a certain privileging

of Persian (which term included Arabic) words and usages began to appear

throughout the Urdu world in the second half of the century, and persists to a

certain extent even today.

Mushafi, Divana, Qalandar Bakhsh Jur'at (1161 1224/ 1748 1809) and Insha 1

al Lah Khan Insha (1169 1232/ 1756 1817) settled in Lucknow. Sa'adat Yar Khan

Rangin (1171 1249/ 1758 i834f) spent long periods of time there. Rangin is

credited with inventing the rekhti, a genre of poetry expressing female senti

ments and experience, using women's vocabulary. These poets helped estab

lish Lucknow as a rival to Delhi. Centres of literary activity sprang up in many

other places such as Allahabad, Banaras, Baroda, Calcutta, Murshidabad, Patna and Rampur. Hyderabad was already there, and had attracted Delhi's

major poet Shah Nasir (1168? 1253/1755? 1838), who left behind him numerous

shagirds in Delhi.

In 1800 the British established a college at Fort William in Calcutta for training British civil servants. The dynamism of John Gilchrist helped produce

many Urdu works there which gained wide repute. The college also became

famous as the virtual creator of modern Urdu prose. This is not quite true, but

the works produced at the college, particularly Bagh bahar (Garden and spring, 1219/1805) by MTr Amman (1163 1252/1750 1837), gained far wider

currency than the work of Murad al Lah Sambhali and others. The college
printed MTr's Kulliyat (Collected verse) in 1811. MTr had died in 1810 in
Lucknow. A railway line passes through the area where his grave used to
be.

18 S. W. Fallon, A new Hindustani English dictionary (Lucknow, 1986 [1879] (repr.)), p. x.

17

History writing

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The two Arabic words most commonly associated with 'history', ta'rikh and
khabar (pi. akhbar), reveal conflicting ideas regarding writing about the past.
Derived from ancient Near Eastern roots, ta'rikh conveys a sense of dating,
whereas khabar, meaning 'story, anecdote', bears no notion of fixation of time
at all. Earlier historical reports were known as akhbar, whereas ta'rikh came
later to acquire a wider definition of 'history' and 'historical interpretation'. By
the end of the second/ eighth century most of the works written on history
bore the tide ta'rikh. It was later uniformly adopted into other Islamic
languages: Persian, Turkish and Urdu. 1 A massive corpus under the rubric
of ta'rikh chronicle, biographical dictionary, administrative geography was
produced over the period in question. Of these, only chronicles will be

surveyed here.

The 'classical' period (c. 710-1150 CE)

The beginning: hadith scholars and akhbaris
In many ways Islamic history writing began with a 'clean slate'. While pre
Islamic Arabian inscriptions, poetry and the ayyam al 'arab folklore reflect a
nostalgic curiosity about the past, the rise of Arabic Islamic historiography
stemmed from a more practical and immediate motivation. Its genesis lay in
the early akhbar reports, which were mostly short and introduced by an isnad,
similar to that of the hadith. The fact that the two pursuits went hand in hand
in their development reveals the anxiety over control of the narrative in the
early Islamic hermeneutic tradition, and places history squarely in the context
of an auxiliary discipline vis a vis the Qur'an, the collection of hadith and legal
studies. [2]

1 Franz Rosenthal, A history of Muslim historiography (Leiden, 1968), pp. 11 17.
2 On historiography of early Islam see NCHI, vol. I, part IV.

444

History writing

A historian, known as an akhbari, is someone who wrote about remarkable
events with a passion for chronology. An akhbari, such as the Medinan c Urwa
ibn al Zubayr (d. 94/712), was usually a scholar of hadith, who would keep his
day job as a jurist, but was also interested in the maghazi, or the Prophet's

military expeditions and various aspects of his life, as well as the Rashidun
caliphs and the ridda wars. In addition to the mostly hadith material, al Zuhri
(d. 124/741) also dwelt on tales of the qisas al anbiya' (poetry and genealogy).
His contemporary Wahb ibn Munabbih (d. 110/728), of Yemen, used the Arabian folklore and the isra'iliyat (tales related to the Old Testament). Wahb's presentation of divine mission through historical narrative found a strong echo in the work of Ibn Ishaq.

The sua (biography of the Prophet Muhammad) by Ibn Ishaq (d. 150/767) will be discussed elsewhere. What should be noted here is its composi
tional structure that lays out a vision of 'universal history', which would have an everlasting impact on the later development of Islamic histori ography. Consisting of three building blocks the mubtada\ 'the begin ning' (from creation to Muhammad); the maVaih, 'the mission' of the Prophet; and the maghazi it blended the methods of the hadith scholars and the storytellers. 3

While the sua dominated early Muslim historical writing, the inquiry expanded to the activities of the Prophet's Companions and followers, as well as political, social and legal affairs of the Muslim community. A historian living in the Umayyad period, al Waqidi (d. 207/823), was also interested in his own time; in his al Ta'rikh al kabu a wide range of topics was addressed.

With the rise of garrison towns in Iraq, the Kufan akhbaris, Abu Mikhnaf (d. 157/774), c Awana ibn al Hakam (d. 147/764) and Sayf ibn 'Umar (d. 180/
796), emerged, as well as Nasr ibn Muzahim (d. 212/827), the first Shi'ite akhbari. However, it was in Basra that the activities of the akhbaris bloss omed, characterised by more extensive gathering and organisation of histor
ical accounts. The akhbaris also made use of government registers in Iraq and
Syria, which served as sources for genealogy (ansab) and administrative geography (khitat). Among the akhbaris who wrote on the ansab were al Mada'im (d. 225/839), Ibn al Kalbi (d. 204/819) and al Zubayri (d. 233 6/
847 50); attention should also be given to al Haytham ibn 'Adi (d. 206/821),
whose Kitab al ta'rikh ^ala al sinin (History according to the years) was

3 A. A. Duri, The rise of historical writing among the Arabs, ed. and trans. Lawrence Conrad
(Princeton, 1983), pp. 33 6.

445

The New Cambridge History of Islam

probably the first in the annalistic form, which was to become the conven
tional format for chronicles. Besides the akhbaris, philologists studied and
wrote history. Their interest in Qur] an related philology led them to the
akhbar and ansab materials found in poetry. Abu 'Ubayda (d. 211/826)
arranged these materials pertaining to particular events or subjects in book
form. Little, however, is known about the process by which individual
accounts were incorporated into books, since most of the aforementioned
works are lost today. They only survive in later revised forms or quotations
by a new generation of historians in the second half of the third /ninth
century, who gave the classical tradition of Muslim history writing its
definitive form.

Al-Taban and 'universal history'

The works of al Baladhuri (d. 279/892), al Ya'qubi (d. 284/897), Ibn Qutayba
(d. 276/889), al Dinawari (d. 282/895) and al Tabari (d. 310/923) exemplified
the new trend towards producing 'universal histories'. Al Baladhuri' s Futuh
al buldan chronicled the Muslim conquests of the provinces. Despite his
affiliations with the 'Abbasids al Baladhuri made a serious effort to be 'objec
tive' in presentation. The Ta'rlkh of al Ya'qubi included a synopsis of universal
history prior to Islam and of Islamic history up to his time. Al Ya'qubi
organised his history according to the reigns of the caliphs and then presented
events in chronological order. Ibn Qutayba's al Ma'anf offered an encyclopae

die compendium in which various narrative lines were blended together. It began with the creation and ended in the days of the 'Abbasid caliph al Mu'tasim. Al DTnawari's al Akhbar al tiwal also adhered to chronological
order, but was more selective in the presentations.

Al Tabari' s Ta'rikh al rusul wa al muluk (History of the prophets and kings)
marks the high point of Muslim historical writing. The title reflects his view of
history, expressed in two conceptions: the oneness of prophetic mission; and
the experiences of the Muslim community through time. He was particularly
keen to give variant accounts of an event or subject, and he kept a strict annalistic form, even at the expense of a coherent continuous narrative line.
Al Tabari' s prose is simple and straightforward, with little rhetorical embel
lishment. The "Tabari model' marked the end of the formative phase of Arabic Islamic historiography, characterised by compilation of ancient akhbar
introduced by their isnads. It also marked a change of informants and writers,
from early akhbaris to the kuttab bureaucrats under whose stewardship other
forms, such as biography and administrative geography (masalik, kitab al kharaj), also flourished.

446

History writing

Variations after al-Tabarx

Following in al Tabari' s footsteps, annalistic chronicles centred on the affairs
of the Muslim caliphate remained the mainstay of history writing. Many continuations of al Tabari were produced all over the Muslim empire; among these were the Silat Ta'rikh al Tabari by 'Arib al Qurtubi (d. c. 365/

975), of Spain, and those by the Sabian clan in Baghdad. The significance of the
latter lies not only in the rich accounts they provided (being court physicians),
but also in the fact that the patriarch Thabit ibn Qurra (d. 288/901) was
commissioned by the caliph al Mu'tadid to chronicle his reign, thus marking
the beginning of court patronage of history writing.

It seems likely that the Persian Buyids were the dynasty that instigated
the tradition of 'official history'. The long list of court historians began with
Miskawayh (d. 421/1030), an Iranian born katib whose Tajarib alumam is
considered the most important source for the history of the Abbasids and
Buyids. Miskawayh adopted an ethical and philosophical perspective, and was
influential on Persian historiography. New types of historical writing emerged
during the Abbasid period as well. The anonymous Akhbar al dawla
al 'Abbasiya recounted the various stages of the 'Abbasid da'wa. Al Mas'udi
(d. 345/956), in Muruj al dhahab, chronicled the early caliphate and covered a
wide range of literary and intellectual topics. The Kitab al awraq of Abu Bakr
al Suit (d. 335/946) offered a lyrical portrait, in prose and verse, of life at the
court of the caliphs al Radi and al Muttaql Al Tanukhf s (d. 384/995) Nishwar
al muhadara is a collection of anecdotes on social life, reminiscent of Abu
al Faraj's masterpiece oiadab, the Kitab al agharii. 4

Local histories developed in Iraq and Egypt. The Iraqis tended to focus on
the hadith scholars associated with a place, such as Tayfur's (d. 280/893)
Ta'rikh Baghdad and al Azdt's (d. 334/945) Ta'rikh al Mawsil, or on the topo
graphical and geographical features of a place, such as Bahshal's (d. 288/900)
Ta'rikh Wasit. The works produced in Egypt, on the other hand, took different
directions: Ibn [Abd al Hakam's (d. 257/870) Futuh Misr chronicles the Muslim
conquests of Egypt, and al Kindt's (d. 350/961) Kitab al wulat and Kitab al qudat
dealt with administrative and legal affairs. Unfortunately, the study of the
Fatimid dynasty in Egypt, by all indications a time of great history writing, is

seriously hampered by the 'ghost' effect: that is, that so many lost Fatimid
chronicles only survived in later compendiums. Among these, the works of

4 Hugh Kennedy, The Prophet and the age of the caliphate: Tde Islamic Near East from the sixth
to eleventh century (London, 1986), pp. 350 97.

447

The New Cambridge History of Islam

Ibn Zulaq al Laythl (d. 386/996) and Muhammad al Musabbihi (d. 420/1029)
are frequently mentioned.

The 'post-classical' period (c. 1150-1500 CE)

'Islamic history' and dynastic chronicle

Despite its influence, al Tabarf s paradigm of universal history with an Islamic
perspective did not totally prevail. The centuries after al Tabari were a time of
experimentation on the part of historians with diverse purposes and back grounds. In this respect, c Izz al Din Ibn al Athir (d. 630/1233) perhaps best
exemplifies the post Tabari' phase that led up to the next efflorescence of history writing in the Ayyubid and Mamluk periods. Having witnessed Saladin's military campaigns and enjoyed the patronage of the Zangid rulers
of Aleppo and Mosul, Ibn al Athtr represented a line of provincial historians
who chronicled Iraq, Syria and Egypt during a time of rapid transformation
and upheaval within the Muslim community and on the international front.

The historiography of the Ayyubid and Mamluk periods is usually charac
terised as one of conservatism, in so far as the classical forms chronicle,
biography, administrative manual were maintained and the activities of
the
political and military elites, along with the careers of the 'ulama\ predomi
nated. 5 Ibn al Athtr is a fine example of this tradition. His Kamil fi al
ta^rlkh
(The complete work of history) presented a refined version of al Tabarf s
vision, but showed an inclination towards a topical approach that would
break away from the rigid year by year format. The Kamil also introduced
the bipartite arrangement of hawadith (events) and wafayat (obituaries);
this,
together with its judicious choice of sources (but usually without naming
them), was to become the norm for centuries to come.

Unlike Ibn al Athir, other contemporary historians were bureaucrats in
the
service of the Zangid dynasty and, later, the Ayyubid princes, and they all
wrote in a different genre: the dynastic chronicle cum royal biography.
The
courtier Ibn al Qalanisf s (d. 555/1160) Dhayl ta'rikh Dimashq, a sequel
to an
earlier chronicle, sheds light on the affairs in Syria as well as the
Crusades. In
Cairo, of Saladin's two 'official' historians, al Katib al Isfahan! (d.
597/1201)
wrote al Fath al qussi fi alfath al Qudsi, which gave an account of
Saladin's

5 Donald Little, 'Historiography of the Ayyubid and Mamluk epochs', in
Carl F. Petry (ed.),
The Cambridge history of Egypt, 2 vols. (Cambridge, 1998), vol. I: Islamic
Egypt; Li Guo,
'Mamluk historiographic studies: The state of the art', Mamluk Studies
Review, 1 (1997).

6 Ibn al Athir, The annals of the Saljuq Turks: Selections from al Kamil fi
'1 ta'rikh of'Izz al Din
Ibn al Athir, trans. D. S. Richards (London, 2002), pp. 1 8.

448

career, and al Barq al Shaml, which covered a wider range of Ayyubid princes
and events. His highly ornate Persianate style shows traits of the bilingualism
popular at the time. Al Qadi al Fadil (d. 596/1200) was a Palestinian who had a
successful career in the Fatimid chancery and then served at Saladin's court.
His RasaHl (Essays) and Mutajaddidat (Diaries) are detailed records of his
observations, showing a new attempt at thematic treatment of a particular
subject or event. By and large, the approach of 'official historians', who
combined dynastic chronicle and royal biography, laced with rhetoric embel
lishments, dominated the narratives of the period. This was the era of Muslim
warrior heroes. The literature reflected the Zeitgeist.

While court affiliated chroniclers wrote dynastic chronicles in Cairo, else
where, especially in Syria, the tradition of writing 'universal history' was
carried on by the mostly Hanbali 'ulatntV / historians. Among these, Sibt Ibn
aljawzi's (d. 654/1256) Mi? at alzamanfi ta'rikh ala L yan (The mirror of the
ages with regard to the biographies of the notables) generated a series of
sequels. From its title a new criterion for history may be discerned: a balanced
presentation of remarkable events and biographies of the learned men.

The trend of dynastic chronicle cum royal biography, on the other hand,
continued in Syria as well, with a tighter focus and new heroes. Abu Shama
(d. 665/1267) wrote al Rawdataynfiakhbaral dawlatayn, about the reigns of the
Ayyubid sultans Nur al Din and Saladin. Ibn Shaddad (d. 684/1285) wrote a
history of his hometown Aleppo (Tcfrikh Halab) and a chronicle of the reign of
the Mamluk sultan Baybars. Ibn Wasil (d. 697/1298), born in Aleppo and later
based in Cairo, wrote the Mufarrij al kurubji akhbar bani Ayyub, in which the
house of Ayyub was portrayed in an idealised light; he also covered the early
Mamluk period.

Tradition and diversity in Mamluk historiography

The Mamluk period is arguably the most documented era in Islamic history,
in no small part due to the overwhelming quantity and extreme richness of the
historical sources produced, of which only an outline account is possible here.
An overview of Mamluk historiography reveals the consolidation of the
annalistic form. In the early ('Bahri') period, bureaucratic historians wrote
both universal histories and dynastic annals. Abu al Fida' (d. 732/1331), an
Ayyubid prince of Hama, wrote al Mukhtasar fi ta'nkh al bashar, a chronicle
supplemented by short obituaries. Baybars al Mansuri (d. 725/1325) compiled
the Zubdat alfikrafi ta^rikh al hijra, a universal history, and al Tuhfa al mulukiya
fi al dawla al Turkiya, an epitome, with special reference to the 'Turks'
(Mamluks), in rhymed prose. During the later ('Burji') period independent

449

and semi official historians wrote mostly universal histories. Ibn al Furat's
(d. 807/1405) Ta'rikh al duwal wa al muluk was arranged on a day by day basis.
Al Maqrizi's (d. 845/1442) al Suluk lima'rifat duwal al muluk and Ibn Hajar
al 'Asqalarifs (d. 852/1449) Inba' alghumr fl abna 1 al 'umr are both annalistic
histories of the Mamluk state during the authors' lifetime, with a more
focused approach. Badr al Din al Aym's (d. 855/1451) l Iqd aljuman fx ta'rikh
ahl al zaman stands out as accessible and judicious in identifying and quoting

from sources. Ibn Taghribirdi (d. 874/1470) wrote two major chronicles: al
Nujum al zahirafx muluk Misr wa al Qahira, a history of Islamic Egypt, and the
Hawadith al duhurfx mada al ayyam wa al shuhur, a continuation of al Maqrizi's
al Suluk. Al Sakhawi(d. 902/1497) wrote continuations to al Dhahabi's (d. 748/
1348) Ta'rikh al Islam and al Maqrizi's al Suluk. The latter, titled al Tibr al
masbuk fx dhayl al Suluk, was commissioned by the amir Yashbak during the
reigns of Khushqadam and Qaytbay. By and large, later Mamluk chroniclers
maintained some distance from the regime.

All these works have a standard format: each year begins with a list of the
rulers and general information (the Nile flood, market prices, natural disasters
etc.). Events are narrated in month by month, or day by day, order, with
some topical highlights. It became such a fixed procedure that we find, in an
unfinished ninth/ fifteenth century autography, that numerous blanks were
left so the data could be filled in when available. 7 The rigid annalistic format
also dominated, or influenced, chancery manuals and biographical diction
aries. In al Nuwayri's (d. 733/1333) administrative handbook Nihayat al arabfi
funun al adab, two thirds consisted of annals arranged according to regions and
dynasties. Al 'Umari's (d. 749/1349) Masalik alabsar fx mamalik alamsar, an
encyclopaedia of the lands and administration of the Mamluk realm, contains a
section of annals, dating from the hijra to the author's time. The entries of
biographical dictionaries were mostly arranged according to year; on the other
hand, obituaries became an integral part of a conventional chronicle. The
renewed interest in such materials was an outgrowth of the regional studies in
hadxth, especially as championed by the Hanbalis in Syria.

This kind of regionalism, together with other factors, further fuelled com
peting versions in history writing. Despite the conservative conventions of

mainstream history writing there were some noteworthy deviations in content,
form and style. Many factors contributed to the phenomenon, not least of

7 Ibrahim ibn 'Umar al Biqa'i, Ta'rikh al Biqa'i, MS Medina, Maktabat al Shaykh 'Arif
Hikmat 3789.

8 Ulrich Haarmann, 'Auflosung und Bewahrung der klassichen Formen arabischer
Geschichtsschreibung in der Zeit der Mamluken', ZDMG, 121 (1971).

History writing

which is the broadening background of the historians: besides the 'ulama' and
the kuttab clerks, a third type emerged, that of the awlad al nas, the offspring of
the Mamluks, whose connections enabled them to be prominent bureaucrats.
All of these groups clustered in metropolitan centres and vied for prestige.

In Cairo, royal biographers /dynastic chroniclers continued their labour.
Ibn [Abd al Zahir (d. 692/1292) was commissioned to write history on behalf of
three sultans: Baybars, Qalawun and al Ashraf KhaM. Shaft 1 al Misrt (d. 730/
1330) did the same for Baybars and Qalawun. In Syria, the hadith scholars wrote
annals chronicling political, military and religious affairs as well as obituaries
of their fellow 'ulama\ Ibn Kathrr (d. c. 774/1373) and al DhahabI penned
'popular' histories (al Bidaya wa al nihaya and Ta'rikh al Islam, respectively).
The lesser known al Jazart (d. 739/1338), al Birzalt (d. 739/1339) and al Yunfm
(d. 726/1326) wrote rigorously researched and original continuations of

Ayyubid works. Their compilations contain substantial hadith materials and

an excessive amount of space devoted to the Who's Who of the literati, with

profuse quotations of poetry and adab. 9

To be sure, the Syrian historians were by no means provincial in their coverage, in that their accounts about events in Egypt oftentimes proved to

be more reliable than those of their Cairene counterparts. 10 The difference

between the two camps lay in their concept of history writing, and in their

selectiveness in coverage. The semi official chroniclers in Cairo concentrated

on the Mamluk regime, whereas the Syrians were more concerned with preserving the religious and cultural heritage of the umma, especially at times of crisis. The dichotomy in the historical writings of the early Mamluk

period took an interesting turn later, with the increasing rivalry among the

largely immigrant L ulama' populace in Cairo. The fierce competition produced

winners, losers and eccentrics, in personality and writing style. For the last, the

recording, and representation, of the past became increasingly autobiograph

ical and opinionated, with unapologetically personal and deliberately subjec

tive renderings of the events and persons.

This synergy between formal grandeur and individual eccentricity was evident in the trend of literarisation. 11 To popularise their works many

9 Al Yunim, Early Mamluk Syrian historiography: al Yunim's Dhayl mir'at al zaman, ed. and

trans. Li Guo (Leiden, 1998).
10 Little, 'Historiography', p. 429.
n The phenomenon is not confined to the Mamluk period (see Stefan Leder (ed.), Story

telling in the framework of non fictional Arabic literature (Wiesbaden, 1998); Julie Meisami,

'History and literature', Iranian Studies, 33, 1 2 (2000)), but the Mamluk time produced

its most extensive documentation.

historians adopted literary devices. Ibn al Dawadari's (d. after 736/1335)
Kanz aldurar wajami' alghurar revealed a return to pre hadxih era Arabian
anecdotal narrative, peppered with poetry and storytelling. Musa al Yusufi's
(d. 759/1358) Nuzhat al nazir ft sirat al malik alNasir used street language to
depict the looks and personalities of the people, and the atmosphere surround
ing the dramatised events. Ibn Iyas's (d. 930/1524) BadaH 1 al zuhur is viewed by
many as 'historicized folk romance'. 11

In this regard, the marketability of history books was also important.
History was useful. Works such as al Nuwayri's Nihayat al arab were com
posed to meet the need of the kuttab and the career oriented youth for
historical information and narrative skills. Entertainment values also counted.
Ibn al Dawadari's and Ibn Iyas's annals, spiced with nawadir and c aja'ib
(witticism and mirabilia), were targeting a wide audience. The attempt to
bring history closer to the reader is further seen in the new language cultivated
by historians. Instead of the formal 'Arabiya that had dominated historical
writings, the reader was now treated to a mixture of the classical Arabic and
lightly stylised colloquial.

Ibn Khaldun's legacy: the Maghrib and Ottoman experiences

The richness, and diversity, of post classical Muslim historiography is also
seen in yet another significant frontier: North Africa and Andalusia. In philo

sophical terms it was heralded by the 'new science' of history writing champ

ioned by Ibn Khaldun. Centred around the notion of 'asabiyya, or 'group consciousness', this took historical sequence, historical units and state struc

ture as the guidelines for historical discourse. Both North African and Andalusian historians recognised a Berber identity within the Islamic frame

work, and made the history of the Berber dynasties the focus of historical interest. This Berber centred historical thinking manifests itself in major works, such as the Kitab al ansab, better known as the Mafakhir al barbar, a

narrative of the Berbers in chronological order attributed to Athir al Din Abu

Hayyan (d. 745/1344), a Cairo based Berber expatriate; Ibn Marzuq's (d. 781/

1379) Musnad, a detailed account, in the form of memoir, of the Marinids; and

Ibn Khaldun's Kitab al Hbar, a history of the Maghrib, as part of his planned

universal history of Arabs, Berbers and other people. With regard to compo

sition, the new school also diverged from the Arabo Islamic paradigm, in that

12 Ulrich Haarmann, Quellenstudien zur jrilhen Mamlukenzeit (Freiburg, 1969); Little,
'Historiography', pp. 424 5.

452

History writing

the thematic and encyclopaedic majmiCa, or collections of essays, replaced the
ta'rikh. annals. 13

In the Mashriq this 'new science' never really took off until the tenth/ sixteenth century, when Ibn Khaldun was to be rediscovered by Ottoman

historians. 14 Ibn Khaldun, and especially his theory of the rise and decline of
states, had a profound influence on the works of the major figures of Ottoman
historiography; among them Weysi Effendi (d. 1628), whose Khwab name was
a world history in the form of a conversation between Ahmed I and Alexander
the Great, with a comparison of the new and old orders and systems and a
critique of the time; Hajji Khalifa (Katib Celebi, d. 1657), the most prolific
Ottoman historian and bibliographer who wrote Fadhlakat al tawarikh, a
universal history, in Arabic, and Fedhleke, a chronicle of the Ottoman empire,
in Turkish; and Na'Tma (d. 1716), the leading Ottoman historian whose Ta'rikh i
NaHma is considered to be the most important source on the Ottoman state
ideology and history. 15

Persian history writing (c. 1050-1600 CE)

Arab chroniclers' interest in Iran goes back to the beginning of Islamic
historiography. Persian Islamic historical writing, however, came much
later. The indigenous Iranian traditions the pre Islamic Sasanian works in
Pahlavi (Middle Persian) and the Samanid Shahnama type are collections of
legends and myths. Devoid of chronological sequence and loose in factual
accuracy, they were not considered serious histories among the cultural elite
familiar with the Arabic model fashioned after al Tabari. Although Persian has
long been the lingua franca in the Muslim east (Iran, Central Asia), major
histories of Iran and Persianate dynasties, the Buyids and Saljuqs, were written

13 Maya Shatzmiller, The Berbers and the Islamic state: The Marinid experience in pre
protectorate Morocco (Princeton, 2000), pp. 4 13, 71 81.

14 Modern scholars have long debated over the success and 'failure' of Ibn Khaldun as a
practising historian. A commonly held view is that the conventional narrative of the

Kitab al 'ibar does not live up to the methodological boasts of the Muqaddima, or
Prolegomena. This view has been challenged in recent publications; see Aziz al Azmeh,
Ibn Khaldun (London, 1990); Little, 'Historiography', pp. 433 6; Tarif Khalidi, Arabic
historical thought in the classical period (Cambridge, 1994), pp. 222 31; Chase Robinson,
Islamic historiography (Cambridge, 2003), pp. 102, 185 6.

15 Ibn Khaldun, The Muqaddimah: An introduction to history, trans. Franz Rosenthal, 3 vols.
(London, 1986), vol. I, pp. lxvii lxvii, xc xcix; Cornell Fleischer, 'Royal authority,
dynastic cyclism, and "Ibn Khaldunism" in sixteenth century Ottoman letters', Journal
of Asian and African Studies, 17, 3 4 (1983), pp. 199 203.

453

in Arabic. Hence the long standing Arabocentric overview which has recently
been subjected to criticism. 1

The pre-Mongol phase

The rise of Persian Islamic historical writing coincided with historical develop
ments in the fourth/tenth century, when breakaway dynasties began to carve
out territory. Ma'mari's prose Shahnama was at the head of a tradition
culminating in Firdawsi's verse Shahnama. Bal'ami translated al Tabari.
During the ensuing period translations and imitations of histories written in
Arabic, such as 'Utbi's (d. 427 or 31/1036 or 40) Ta^rikh al Yamini, a history of
the Ghaznavids, dominated the field. This coincided with the rise of a new

Persian literary language, in which historians began writing original narra
tives. Abu al Fadl Bayhaqi (d. 470/1077) was a key figure and his Mujalladat
(Voluminous [history]) set a model for dynastic history. Bayhaqi's work
showed the influence of his Arabic counterparts, such as Miskawayh, but
also revealed Persian characteristics. From the surviving portion of the work,
which covers the reign of Mas c ud, hence the title Ta^rikh i Mas'udi, some
marked features the religio moral dimension, the use of digressions (flash
backs and inserted anecdotes) and the indifference to the indigenous tradi
tions all reveal his Islamic project, with a strong Shi'ite undertone. 17 This
Islamic perspective with a regional focus continued to be cultivated by other
Ghaznavid historians, in Gardizf s earlier Zayn al akhbar, a history of Persia
with special references to Khurasan, and the anonymous Tarikh i Slstan.

As for Saljuq history writing, 'mirrors for princes' overshadowed the ta^rikh
genre. The Siyasatnama by Nizam al Mulk (d. 485/1092), who attempted to
organise the Turko Saljuq administration after the Persianate Ghaznavid
manner, was one such 'mirror'. Essentially a handbook, it demonstrated the
uses of history and the connection between historical, ethical and political
thought. The idealised picture of the ruler was a recurrent theme in the
dynastic histories of the Saljuq era. Among these were the Farsnama of
Ibn al Balkhi; the anonymous Mujmal al tavarikh va al qisas, a textbook;
Nishapuri's (d. 582/1187) Saljuqnama, which chronicled the twilight years of
the regime; Ravandfs lavish and encyclopaedic Rahat al sudurwa ayat al surur,
whose history section is replete with panegyrics of the Saljuq ruler.
Jarbadhqam's Persian treatment of c Utbi's Ta'nfeh was more telling. Like

16 Julie Meisami, Persian historiography to tfie end of the twelfth eentury (Edinburgh, 1999).

17 Marilyn Waldman, Toward a theory of historical narrative: A case study in Perso Islamicate
historiography (Columbus, 1980).

History writing

Bal c am?s translation of al Tabari, Jarbadhqams was more than a
translation.
By updating 'Utbl and manipulating the wording, Jarbadhqanf s work is
intricately intertextual: it is a history of the Ghaznavids, but one that
alludes
to the Saljuqs as ideal rulers. Ibn Funduq's (d. c. 565/1169) Tarikh i
Bayhaqi,
which focused on the learned men from Bayhaq, was something different.
It
also demonstrated a sophisticated bilingualism, with its eloquent and
flowing
Persian style together with heavy mixture of Arabic.

Features of Persian chronicle writing were already established in pre
Mongol works, chief among them the dibachah (preface) and khatima
(con
elusion), that contained information about the purpose, method and
sources.
Other elements paralleled the development in Arabic counterparts:
thematic
presentation of a chronicle, supplemented by various interpolations. In
terms
of language and style, rhyming prose (saf), inspired by chancery Arabic
writing of the Abbasid era, was common.

The Mongol and post-Mongol phase

The wide horizons were explored under Mongol patronage in what was
the golden age of Persian historiography. The importance of Persian
sources
for the history of the Mongol empire has long been acknowledged. The
standard bearers were Juzjani (fi. 1260), whose Tabaqat i Nasiri is a
dynastic
history of the Ghurids of Afghanistan; Juwaym (d. 681/1283), whose
Tarikh i

Jahangushay (The history of the world conqueror, i.e. Chinggis Khan) covered
the history of the Mongol empire; Rashid al Dfn (d. 718/1318), whose Jami'
al tawarikh was a wide ranging 'world history'; and Wassaf (fi. 698 723/1299
1323), whose Ta'rikhi Wassaf was meant to be a continuation of Juwaym s
work, but ranged far and wide. 1

The history of the Timurid dynasty was extensively covered in Arabic, Persian and Ottoman Turkish. Numerous official histories were produced under the Trmurid princes. The conquests of Timur provided the main subject
of 'All al Shami (d. before 814/1411), Natanzi (fi. 818/1415), Hafiz i Abru (d. 833/
1430), All Yazdi (d. 858/1454) and Ibn Arabshah (d. 854/1450). Pretensions to
Islamic universality were expressed in Hafiz i Abru's Zubdat al tawarikh, Khwandamir's (d. c. 941/1535) Habib al siyarfi akhbar afrad al bashar and 'Abd
al Razzaq Samarqandi's (d. 887/1482) Matla' i Sa'dayn. 19

18 David Morgan, 'Persian historians and the Mongols', in David Morgan (ed.), Medieval
historical writing in tfte Christian and Islamic worlds (London, 1982).

19 John Woods, 'The rise of Timurid historiography', JNES, 46 (1987).

455

The New Cambridge History of Islam

Under the Safavids Persian historical writing continued to flourish, and included the method of 'imitative writings'. Safavid historians based their histories on certain models, using certain conventional elements, while mak
ing changes over time to reflect current dynastic ideology. There was also a

high literary tradition that followed the model of Mirkhvand (d. 903/1498), in
his Rawzat al sofa, which adopted the Timurid trend of ornate prose. Later
'invented tradition' featured dramatisation, invented speech and deeds and
predictive dreams. Iranian elements also stand out, such as the use of numer
ical symbolism (the abjad system) and the involvement of court astrologers in
writing chronicles, in the case of Yazdi's Ta'rikh i 'Abbasi. 2 '

Indo-Muslim historical writing
Medieval Indian history writing effectively began with the Muslims. The early
authors were all working with the didactic religious framework. Amir
Khusraw (d. 725/1325) was a court poet famous for his historical poems. The
Futuh alsalatin by c Isami (completed in 750/1349) was modelled after the
Shahnama. Rich in information and artistry, their value for historical inquiry
has been disputed. Chronicles written in prose began to be produced soon
after. The Ta'rikh i Fimz Shahiby Barani (completed in 758/1357) and Siraj c Afif
(completed before 801/1399) respectively, and the Ta'rikh i Mubarak Shahi by
Yahya Sirhindl (completed around 831/1428) are royal biographies cum
dynastic chronicles of the Delhi sultanate. 21

History writing was a cultural exercise at the Mughal court. Persian
speaking rulers were chroniclers of their own time, among them Babur
(r. 932 7/1526 30), the founder of the dynasty who wrote the Baburnama in
Chaghatay Turkish, and his son Humayun (r. 937 47/1530 40 and 962 3/1555
6). The best known of the Mughal historians, Abu al Fazl ibn Mubarak,
flourished in the reign of Akbar ibn Humayun (r. 964 1014/ 1556 1605) and
his Akbarnama covered the later Mughal period.

History writing in the Islamic world, as it evolved, acquired distinctive
purposes and narrative features. These determined the nature of chronicles
collections of human interest stories purporting to contain some factual truth
with fixed dates which, in turn, goes a long way to explain why in most

respects we know so little about past Islamic cultures. The limitations of the
chronicle sources are obvious: little can be learned about economy; virtually

20 Sholeh A. Quinn, Historical writing during the reign of Shah 'Abbas: Ideology, imitation, and
legitimacy in Safavid chronicles (Salt Lake City, 2000).

21 Peter Hardy, Historians of Medieval India: Studies in Indo Muslim historical writing
(London, 1997).

456

History writing

nothing about Everyman, women and children, let alone domestic life and community. 2,2 Moreover, problems arise when historians used literary, even
fictional devices in their chronicles. Given the imperfect match between 'what
really happened' and 'what was meant to be told', there is still much that needs
to be investigated. The quality of chronicles may frustrate modern students;
but in terms of their primary function constructing meaningful narratives to
educate, inspire and entertain they worked quite well.

22 Stephen Humphreys, Islamic history: A framework for inquiry
(Princeton, 1991).

457

i8

Biographical literature

MICHAEL COOPERSON

Terms and definitions

Much of the so called biographical literature in classical Arabic, Persian and
Turkic has little in common with modern biography. Most of the pre
modern examples consist of short entries collected together in so called
biographical dictionaries. To modern readers such entries seem oddly
uninformative. An entry on a poet, for example, may contain extensive
citations of his or her verses, but practically nothing about his life. An entry
on a jurist, similarly, will list his teachers and students, his works and his
date of death; but it will not report his reasons for embarking upon the
study of the law, or attempt to account for his professional successes and
failures by referring to his quirks of personality. Because of these differ
ences, some modern scholars refer to entries in collective works as 'proso
pography', reserving the term 'biography' only for stand alone works
devoted to a single subject. Yet even the biographies proper display little
interest in how the subject 'came to be who he was'. 1 His character is tacitly
assumed to be fixed, and the succession of anecdotes merely displays it from
different points of view.

Pre modern authors do not use any term that corresponds exactly to
'biography'. Unlike such Greek terms as musike and geografia, biografia never
found its way into the classical Islamic languages as the designation of an
activity or a discipline. (The borrowed term does, however, exist in modern
Arabic, Persian and Turkish as biyiighrafiya, biyugrafi and biyografi respec
tively where it is commonly used to designate works written on the now
naturalised Western model.) In classical Arabic, texts that foreground the
human subject were called tarjama (entry) or sira (stand alone single subject

i Chase F. Robinson, Islamic historiography (Cambridge, 2003), p. 61.

458

Biographical literature

biography), among another things. 2 In Persian, a text about a person was
called shark i ahwal and in Ottoman Turkish tarjame ye hal, both terms mean
ing roughly 'account of circumstances'; or, in both languages, tadhkira, mean
ing 'document' or 'memoir', a term also applied to a collection of entries. 3
Generically, the texts that belong to all these categories were commonly
understood as constituting a branch of ta'rikh, 'writing about datable events'
or, more broadly, 'history'. 4

In applying the term 'biography' to the pre modern corpus, twentieth
century Western scholars enabled themselves to complain that the texts in
question fail to resemble the productions of Plutarch and Suetonius. 5 That pre
modern accounts of individuals in Arabic, Persian and Turkic differ from
their Greek and Roman counterparts is indisputable. Whether this difference
constitutes a failure is a question that has come to be addressed and finally
dismissed as a distraction only in the last half century of Western scholar
ship. Taking advantage of the documentary element of the corpus, historians
now use it regularly as a source for social and intellectual history. 6 Meanwhile,
literary critics have learned to analyse it in terms of its own conventions
of production and reception. 7 In all these ways modern scholarship has
dispelled some of the confusion created by applying the term 'biography' to

2 For surveys see M.J. L. Young, 'Arabic biographical writing', in M.J. L. Young, J.D.
Latham and R. B. Sergeant (eds.), The Cambridge history of Arabic literature, vol. Ill:
Religion, learning, and science in the Abbasid period (Cambridge, 1990); Robinson, Islamic
historiography, pp. 61 74.

3 For surveys see Felix Tauer, 'History and biography', in Jan Rypka et at, History of Iranian
literature (Dordrecht, 1968), esp. pp. 449ff.; J. T. P. de Bruijn, 'Tadhkira (in Persian
literature)', Eh, vol. X, pp. 53 4; J. Stewart Robinson, 'The Ottoman biographies of
poets', JNES, 24 (1965); J. Stewart Robinson, 'Tadhkira (in Turkish literature)', Eh,
vol. X, pp. 54 5.

4 Even here the terms are fluid: the so called guidelines for writing history (adab al
mu'arrikh) attributed by al Subki (d. 771 / 1370) to his father are actually instructions for
writing biographies. See Taj al Din al Subki, Tabaqdt al Shafi'iya al kubrd, ed. Mahmud
al Tanahi and 'Abd al Fattah al Hulw, 10 vols. (Cairo, 1964 76), vol. II, pp. 22 5; trans, in
Franz Rosenthal, A history of Muslim historiography, 2nd rev. edn (Leiden, 1964), p. 372.

5 See, for example, Gustave E. von Grunebaum, Medieval Islam (Chicago, 1946), pp. 22iff.

6 For a survey see R. Stephen Humphreys, Islamic history: A framework for inquiry
(Princeton, 1991), pp. 187 208.

7 For example, Fedwa Malti Douglas, 'Controversy and its effects in the biographical
tradition of al Khatib al Baghdadf, SI, 46 (1977); Hartmut Fahndrich, 'The Wafayat
al a'yan of Ibn Khallikan: A new approach', JAOS, 93, 4 (1973); Reinhard Eisener,
Zwischen Faktum und Fiktion: Eine Studie zum Umayyedenkalifen Sulaiman b. 'Abdalmalik
und seinem Bild in den Quellen (Wiesbaden, 1987); T. Emil Homerin, From Arab poet to
Muslim saint: Ibn alFdrid, his verse, and his shrine (Columbia, SC, 1994); Denise

A. Spellberg, Politics, gender, and the Islamic past: The Legacy of'Aisha bint Abi Bakr (New
York, 1994); Michael Cooperson, 'Classical Arabic biography', in Beatrice Gruendler and
Verena Klemm (eds.), Understanding Near Eastern literatures: A spectrum of interdisciplinary
approaches (Wiesbaden, 2000).

459

The New Cambridge History of Islam

pre modern Arabic, Persian and Turkic texts. Nevertheless, it should be remembered that the term is, at best, a convenience.

To better understand pre modern biographical writing, it is helpful to recall
that its primary purpose was often to place individuals within a genealogy of
authority and a network of simultaneous relationships. This project certainly
permitted an account of individual personality. However, it did not require
one. Thus, it was possible to write a 'biographical dictionary' consisting of a
list of names. The topic of the work and the ordering of the names for
example, Malikl jurists active in a particular town, arranged in roughly
chronological order would supply enough context to allow the reader to
appreciate what he was looking at: a list of persons who had participated in the
transmission of vital knowledge in an unbroken sequence that reached back
through the generations to Malik ibn Anas (d. 179/796), and from him to the
Prophet Muhammad and ultimately to God. For living members of the
fraternity, the biographical dictionary documented their claim to be able to
tell their fellow Muslims the difference between right and wrong.

Arguably, then, biography served as a documentary archive and a token of

authority rather than a literary genre. Nevertheless, Muslim scholars of the
seventh/thirteenth century and afterwards speak of such texts as a source of
readerly pleasure. The biographer Yaqut al Hamawi (d. 626/1229), for example,
describes himself as seeking out 'accounts of scholars and men of letters . . . like
one enamored and impassioned, searching as a lover searches for his beloved'. His successor Ibn Khallikan (d. 681/1282), similarly, admits to 'seeking out accounts about, and death dates of, worthy men of the past' with mounting ardour: 'The more material I collected, the more of it I sought.' 9 This self awareness on the part of biographers culminates in the
majestic peroration by al Safadi (d. 764/1362), who credits the genre with
supplying a vision of the resurrected dead:

The reader familiar with tales of people now dead, with the feats of those plunged into the cavern of extinction never to emerge, with the lore of those
who scaled the heights of power, and with the virtues of those whom Providence delivered from the stranglehold of adversity, feels that he has known such men in their own time. He seems to join them on their pillowed
thrones and lean companionably with them on their cushioned couches. He
gazes into their faces some framed in hoods, others lambent under helmets
seeing in the evil ones the demonic spark, and in the good ones the virtue that

8 Yaqut, Mu'jam al udaba', 5 vols. (Beirut, 1991), vol. I, p. 27.

9 Ibn Khallikan, Wafayatal a'yan, ed. Ihsan 'Abbas, 8 vols. (Beirut, 1968 72), vol. I, pp. 19 20.

Biographical literature

places them in the company of angels. He seems to share with them the best
pressings of aged wine in an age where time no longer presses, and to behold
them as in their battles they breathe the sweet scent of swordplay in the
shadows of tall and bloodstained lances. It is as if all that company were of his
own age and time; as if those who grieve him were his enemies, and those
who give him pleasure, his friends. But they have ridden in the vanguard long
before him, while he walks in the rear guard far behind. 10

Fortunately for the literary historian, al Safadi also provides a more prosaic
definition of the genre. Chronicles, he says, narrate events year by year and
thus convey information about persons only in a scattered and incidental
fashion. Biographical entries, on the other hand, bring together all the infor
mation known about a particular person regardless of the year in which a
particular event may have occurred. 11 This definition may be taken as the
minimal formal characterisation of pre modern biographical writing. Yet, as
the comments of al Safadi and his colleagues suggest, the genre could achieve
literary effects of the highest order.

Genealogies and charter myths

The minimal unit of biographical discourse is the name. In Arabic, names
conventionally take the form 'so and so the son or daughter of so and so': that
is, they contain a genealogical component. Commonly, too, they include a
teknonym: 'father or mother of so and so'. Sometimes, they also include a
cognomen: 'the wandering king', 'the one with the kitten', 'the pop eyed'.
Cited in full, a person's name is therefore a capsule biography. Many pre
modern Islamic biographical entries consist solely of names, and many others
consist of names supplemented by a few words of commentary. Even stand
alone biographies begin with the citation of a full name that represents their

subject as part of a group. The biographies of the Prophet Muhammad, for
example, begin with genealogies that trace his lineage through the ancient
prophets all the way back to Adam. In a sense, genealogy is the essence of
biography; all the rest is commentary.

Although tribal genealogies were often a matter of assertion and negotia
tion rather than biological fact, they did constitute a framework within which
scribal culture could convey information about individuals. An even more

io al Safadi, al Wafi hi al wafayat, ed. Helmut Ritter, Sven Dedering, Ihsan 'Abbas et al.,

30 vols. (Leipzig, 1931 2004), vol. I, p. 4.
11 Ibid., p. 42.

461

The New Cambridge History of Islam

powerful framework was that of figurative genealogy: that is, membership in
an intellectual or spiritual line of descent. Among the earliest biographies in
Arabic are those devoted to a single class (ta'ifa, pi. tawa'if) of persons.
According to the listings compiled by al Dhahabi (d. 748/1348), al Safadi and
al Suyuti (d. 911 / 1505), the subjects of siyar and tarajim have included prophets,
Companions of Muhammad, readers and interpreters of the Qur'an, trans
mitters of hadith, legal theorists and jurisconsults, ascetics and mystics, calcu
lators of inheritances, rhetoricians, judges, caliphs, viziers, preachers,
physicians, astronomers, grammarians, theologians, poets, prose writers,
lovers, gamblers and lunatics. 12 Admittedly, most of the surviving works are

devoted to religious scholars, primarily hadith transmitters and jurists. But
entries on persons of all the classes mentioned can indeed be found some
where, though not always in works devoted exclusively to persons of that
class. Finally, it should be noted that a great many classes of people for
example, prayer callers, midwives and rubbish collectors were never com
memorated at all.

Commonly, works devoted to members of a scholarly ta'ifa begin with an
entry on a foundational figure from whom knowledge 'has been transmitted
from one generation to another'. 13 The entry on each subsequent figure lists
his teachers and students and thus establishes his place in a lineage whose
authority derives ultimately from that of the founder. Biographical collections
dealing with grammarians, for example, credit 'All ibn Abi Talib with the
discovery that language is susceptible to systematic description. 'All is then
represented as conveying this insight to Abu al Aswad al Du] ali, who trans
mitted it to the first generation of grammarians. 14 The second generation is
described as having studied with the first, and so on down to the time of the
biographer, who is usually a grammarian himself. 15

The most coveted founder was the Prophet, who stands along with a
transitional figure at the head of several figurative lines of descent.

12 Al Dhahabi in al Sakhawi, al Tlan hi tawbtkh U man dhamma ahl al ta'rikh, ed. Franz
Rosenthal (Baghdad, 1963), pp. 84 6, trans, in Rosenthal, History, pp. 388 91; al Safadi,
Waft, vol. I, pp. 51 5; al Suyuti, Ta'rikh al khulafa', ed. Muhyi al Din 'Abd al Hamld
(Cairo, 1952), p. 1; and further Michael Cooperson, Classical Arabic biography: Tfte heirs of
the prophets in tfte age ofal Ma'mun (Cambridge, 2000), pp. rjff.

13 Al Yaghmuri, Nur al qabas al mukhtasar min al muqtabasfi akhbar al nuhah wa al udaba" wa
al shu'ara' wa al 'ulama\ ed. Rudolf Sellheim (Wiesbaden, 1964), p. 87.

14 Ibid., pp. 4 5; Ibn al Anbari, Nuzhat alalibba' fi tabaqat aludaba', ed. 'A. 'Amir

(Stockholm, 1963), pp. 4 7.

15 See Cooperson, Classical Arabic biography, pp. n 13; and further Monique Bernards,
Changing traditions: al Mubarrad's refutation ofSibawayh and the subsequent reception of the
Kitab (Leiden, 1997).

462

Biographical literature

Biographers of hadlth scholars, for example, represent him as the source of
hadxth reports and his Companions as the first to transmit them. Biographers
of caliphs, similarly, present them as the successors of the Prophet through
Abu Bakr. In biographies of the Shi'ite imams the transitional figure is c Ali,
Muhammad's cousin, son in law and appointed successor. In some cases, such
as that of Sufi biography, the Prophet is invoked only to the extent that his
hadiths are cited in defence of the group's characteristic activity. As the various
intellectual traditions matured biographers often found it sufficient to trace
the collective ancestry back to a more recent figure whose exemplification of
the Prophet's sunna is taken for granted. Biographers of SunnI jurists, for
example, begin with an entry on the founder of the madhhab (legal school),
whom they represent as the teacher of all the members of the first generation
of jurists. A biography of the jurist Abu Hanlfa (d. 150/767) quotes one of his
followers as saying: 'Knowledge has passed from God Almighty to
Muhammad, from him to his Companions, from them to the Successors,
and from them to Abu Hamfa and his disciples. If you accept this, be content

with it; if you don't, too bad for you.' 1

The authors of collective biographies present themselves as documenting
historical fact. In reality they are constructing a history of their
community, a
process that necessarily involves revisionism and back projection, if not
out
right fabrication. In the third/ninth century, for example, there were no
schools of law; there were merely communities of like minded jurists asso
dated with particular teachers or regions. In the biographical collections
devoted to jurists, however, we are given the impression that the Shafi'i
school of law (for example) came into being with al Shafi/i (d. 204/820),
who transmitted its precepts to his faithful band of disciples. His
teachings,
moreover, are represented as including everything later taught by any
mem
ber of his school. In reality, of course, the so called madhhab al Shafi'i
devel
oped over time and only later came to attribute all of its insights to a
putative
founder. The Shafi'i dictionaries do not simply record the results of this
process of revisionism. Rather, they are among the interventions that
enabled
the process to take place. In the case of the legal schools, modern
scholarship
has only recently begun to correct for the distortions introduced by
biographers. 17 In other cases the construction of a 'charter myth' is
more

16 al Khatib al Baghdad!, Ta'rikh Baghdad, ed. 'Abd al Qadir Ata, 20 vols.
(Beirut, 1997),
vol. XIII, p. 336. On the dispute over the jurist's reputation see Eerick
Dickinson,
Ahmad b. al Salt and his biography of Abu Hariifa', JAOS, 116, 3 (1996).

17 See Christopher Melchert, The formation of the Sunni schools of law,
gth 10th centuries CE
(Leiden, 1997).

463

obvious, as when, for example, a biographer of scientists traces the commun
ity's origins to the prophet Enoch, 'the first to teach mathematics, logic, physics and theology'. 1

In later periods the structural role of the figurative genealogy fades or disappears altogether. In biographical dictionaries devoted to people of differ
ent tawa'if who lived in a single town, the position normally occupied by the
founder is occupied instead by a description of the town. For example, al Khatib's fifth/ eleventh century biographical dictionary Ta'rikh Baghdad (History of Baghdad) begins with a detailed topography of the 'Abbasid capital. 19 The centennial dictionaries of the ninth/fifteenth century and after
wards, which are devoted to notables of all sorts who died during a particular
hundred year period, do not begin with a founder. They do, nevertheless, assume the generational scheme characteristic of the earlier collective works.
Finally, the massive biographical dictionaries that include nearly everyone of
importance often begin with a discussion of biography itself. It is in the introductions to such works that nearly all of the self conscious statements
about the genre are to be found.

The form and content of the entry

Given their intended purpose, individual entries in works of collective biog
raphy often have little meaning on their own. Rather, their significance derives
from their place in a figurative genealogy. Here, for example, is an entry from
a third/ninth century Arabic work on hadith transmitters:

Hind bint al Harith al Firasiyya. She was old enough to have met the wives of
the Prophet. She heard hadith from Umm Salama and recited it on the authority of Safiyya bint 'Abd al Muttalib. Al Zuhri recited on her authority. 20

For its original readers, this entry indicated that Hind had heard certain

accounts of the Prophet's words and deeds from Umm Salama, presumably
a reliable source. Hind then passed those accounts on to others, including
al Zuhri (d. 124/742), who later came to be reckoned an exclusive authority for
many reports. Before the compilation of comprehensive and authenticated
collections of hadith in written form this process of transmission was the
community's only way of knowing what the Prophet had said and done.
The transmitters were thus 'the only heirs of the prophets', as Muhammad

18 Ibn al Qifti, Ta'rikh al hukama', ed. Julius Lippert (Leipzig, 1903), p. 1.

19 al Khatib al Baghdad!, Ta'rikh Baghdad, vol. I, pp. 34 138.

20 Ibn Sa'd, al Tabaqat al kuhra, ed. Riyad 'Abd al Hadi, 8 parts in 4 (Beirut, 1996), no. 4658.

464

Biographical literature

himself was supposed to have said. 21 For those who believed that the surma
had the power to 'guide the errant, warn against perdition' and 'save the
ignorant and the damned' 22, the process of hadith transmission was a matter of
compelling interest. Even after the hadith itself was committed to writing
biographers continued to make lists of transmitters, often adding explicit
assessments of each one's trustworthiness. 23

As this account suggests, entries in biographical dictionaries could serve
their intended purpose while containing relatively little information about the
subject's life. Most biographers, however, were unable to resist characterising
their subjects in some way, or supplementing the entry with historical
accounts (akhbaf) associated with them. One hadith biographer, for example,

lets it slip out that a certain transmitter was 'a harsh and ill nature d man, but
he knew the sunna'. 2 "* Another biographer of hadith transmitters occasionally
produces entries that have nothing to do with transmission at all, like the
following:

Al Walld ibn Uqba ibn Mu'it ibn Abi 'Amr ibn Umayya ibn Abd Shams. He
was known as Abu Wahb. His mother was Arwa daughter of Kurayz ibn Habib
ibn Abd Shams. He was the half brother of [the third caliph] 'Uthman ibn
'Affan on the mother's side. When 'Uthman appointed him governor of Kufa,
he built a large residence next to the mosque. Then 'Uthman recalled him,
replacing him with Sa'id ibn al 'As, so he returned to Medina and stayed there
until 'Uthman was assassinated. When the civil war between 'All and Mu'awiya
broke out, al Walld refused to take sides; he went to al Raqqa and secluded
himself there until the conflict was over. He died in al Raqqa, and some of his
descendants still live there; he also has descendants in Kufa. The house he built
in Kufa is the big one called the House of the Cloth Fullers. 25

Instead of describing hadith activity this entry focuses on an issue of equal
importance: how prominent believers of the first generations responded to the
civil wars that divided the community. It also contains apparently trivial detail,
such as the subject's home address. In other collections, such as those on
grammarians, jurists and the like, we find similar digressions, often intended

21 A.J. A. Wensinck et al. (eds.), Concordance et indices de la tradition musulmane, 8 vols.
(Leiden, 1933 88), vol. IV, p. 321.

22 Ibn Hanbal, cited in Ibn al Jawzi, Manaqib al imam Ahmad Ibn Hanbal
(Cairo, 1930), p. 167.

23 For more extended analyses of seemingly opaque entries see Humphreys, Islamic
history, pp. 190 2, and Robinson, Islamic historiography, pp. 70 2.

24 al 'Ijll, cited in Miklos Muranyi, 'Zur Entwicklung der 'Urn al rigal Literatur im 3.
Jahrhundert d. H. Qairawaner Miszellaneen IV, ZDMG, 142, 1 (1992), at p. 61.

25 Ibn Sa'd, Tabaqdt, no. 1848.

to illustrate the subject's excellence in a particular field, to clear him of accusations levelled against him by his detractors, or simply because as one biographer of poets told his readers the mere recitation of a name conveys little unless accompanied by 'a tale, a historical account, a genealogy,
an anecdote or a verse deemed good or unusual'. 2.

Modification of the charter myth and expansion of entries

Like all constructed histories, the charter myths of the various tawa'if were
subject to change over time. For example, the first biographer of the Sufi taHfa,
al Sulami (d. 412/1021), divided the community's history into two parts. The
first was that of the early pietists, the subject of his Tabaqat al nussak (The
generations of ascetics), and the second that of the later mystics, the subject of
his Tabaqat al sufiyya (The generations of Sufis). The titles of these works and
the distribution of entries between them amount to an argument that mysti
cism had developed out of asceticism, as indeed seems plausible historically.

But al Sulamfs student Abu Nu'aym (d. 430/1038) abandoned this carefully
constructed history of Sufism, deciding instead that mystical impulse had
existed since the time of the Prophet. His massive Hilyat al awliya'
(Ornament of the saints) accordingly depicts men from all periods and walks
of life as Sufis. He describes the literalist hadlth scholar Ibn Hanbal (d. 241/855),
for example, as 'teaching the renunciants' and 'cultivating anxiety and pre
occupation', both of which he did in fact do, but then adds that 'Sufism means
polishing oneself with stains, and embellishing oneself with pains', the impli
cation being that Ibn Hanbal was a Sufi whether he knew it or not. 27

In this particular case, the expansion of the charter myth provoked an angry
reaction and a new round of biography writing. Irritated by Abu Nu'aym's
loose and baggy definition of Sufism, the Hanbali preacher and historian Ibn
aljawzi (d. 597/1201) declared that the Prophet and a number of believers in
every age were ascetics, and some of the latter may have been Sufis. But to
speak of every ascetic Muslim as a Sufi is a gratuitous misrepresentation.

26 Ibn Qutayba, al Shi'r wa al shu'ara', ed. Ahmad Muhammad Shakir, 2 vols. (Cairo, 1966),
vol. I, pp. 59 60. On the biographies of poets see further Stefan Leder, 'Friihe
Erzahlungen zu Magun. Magun als Figur ohne Lebensgeschichte', in W. Diem and
A. Falaturi (eds.), XXIV Deutscher Orientalistentag (1988) (Stuttgart, 1990); and Hilary
Kilpatrick, Making the great Book of songs: Compilation and the author's craft in Abu I Faraj
al Isbahani's Kitab al aghani (London, 2003).

27 Abu Nu'aym al Isfahan!, Hilyat al awliya' , 10 vols. (Cairo, 1932 8; repr. Beirut, n.d.), vol.
IX, p. 174.

Biographical literature

Moreover, he says, Abu Nu c aym was a bad biographer. A biographical entry should
contain only reports about the subject, not reports about other people which the
subject happened to have transmitted, but Abu Nu c aym includes many reports of
the second type. He also includes miracle stories, such as reports of levitation,
which may lead impressionable readers to injure themselves by trying the same
thing at home. Finally, no catalogue of saints should omit women. Al Sulami, the
first Sufi biographer, had devoted a whole volume to them, but Abu Nu'aym
neglects them entirely. 2 To rectify these errors Ibn aljawzi compiled his own
dictionary of saints, the Sifat al safwa (Description of the pure elite), which, despite
adding numerous entries on women, is less than half the size of Abu Nu'aym's.

Although many biographers were impressively scrupulous in transmitting
older accounts, others preferred to expand and develop the material available
to them. This expansion is nowhere more evident than in the transition from
Arabic to Persian. The early Arabic biographies of the ascetic Bishr ibn
al Harith (d. 227/842), for example, do not explain the source of his nickname
al Hafi, 'the barefoot'. In the Persian Kashfal mahjub (Revelation of the hidden)
the biographer Hujwiri (d. 465/1072) insists on a mystical interpretation of
Bishr's behaviour, declaring that he was so intensely absorbed in the con
templation of God that he never put anything on his feet: 'A shoe seemed to
him a veil between himself and God'. 29 A later Persian source, the Tadhkirat al
awliya 1 (Memorial of the saints) of 'Attar (d. 617/1220) goes even further. Bishr,
we are told, was drinking in a tavern when a holy man came in bearing a
message from God. Moved to repentance, Bishr fled the tavern without

putting on his shoes, and remained barefoot for the rest of his life. 30 These

elaborations, for which parallels exist in the biographies of many pious early

Muslims, tell us nothing about the historical Bishr. Rather, they illustrate the

ways in which the lives of past exemplars were made meaningful to new

generations of readers. Eventually this process resulted in biographies that

bore little or no relation to historical fact, but were nonetheless powerful

affirmations of spiritual discipleship and collective identity. 31 Readers from

28 Ibn al Jawzi, Sifat al safwa, 2 vols. (Hyderabad, 1936 8), vol. I, pp. 2ff. Al Sulami made

women the subject of a separate work, Dhikr al niswa al muta'abbidat al sufiyat, ed. and

trans. Rkia Elaroui Cornell as Early Sufi women (Louisville, 1999).

29 al HujwM, The 'Kashf al mahjub', the oldest Persian treatise on Sufism, trans. Reynold

A. Nicholson, Gibb Memorial Series 17 (London, 1936 (repr.)), p. 105.

30 'Attar, Tadhkirat al awliya\ ed. R. A. Nicholson, 2 vols. (London, 1905), vol. I, p. 107; see

further Maher Jarrar, 'Bisr und die Barfussigkeit in Islam', Der Islam, 71 (1994);

Cooperson, Classical Arabic biography, pp. 154 87.

31 See further J. A. Mojaddedi, The biographical tradition in Sufism: The tabaqat genre from

al Sulami to Jam! (Richmond, 2001).

Konya, for example, could hardly fail to respond to the following passage from

Afiakfs Persian biography of the mystic poet Jalal al Din Rumi (d. 672/1273):

After Jalal' s death, KIgatu Khan, a Mogul general, came up against Konya,
intending to sack the city and massacre its inhabitants. That night in a dream,
he saw Jalal, who seized him by the throat and nearly choked him, saying to
him: 'Konya is mine. What seekest thou from its people?' 32

Some biographers were reluctant to include stories involving supernatural
events, in some cases denouncing their colleagues for including them. For the
most part, however, authors and readers alike appear to have understood that
biographical reports, like hadlth, came in different degrees of probability and
served different purposes. Thus, dream tales, which could not be confirmed
by independent witnesses, were included not for their historical value but
rather for their ability to 'cheer the heart of the believer'. 33

Single-subject biographies

Two sub genres of biography appear anomalous, at least from the perspective
of the genealogical model. The first of these is the stand alone, single subject
biography. This sub genre owes its existence to the early appearance and
widespread popularity of the Prophetic sira, the first extant versions of which
date to the second /eighth century. As we have seen, even Muhammad does
not entirely escape the genealogical model: the sira begins by placing him in a
line of prophetic succession that begins with Adam. Unusually, however, even
the earliest biographies of the Prophet aim for complete coverage of his life
from birth to death, with the relevant reports arranged in chronological order.
In the following passage, al Samaw'al al Maghrib! (d. c. 570/1175), a physician
and mathematician, describes the experience of reading the siyar:

In these history books there passed before me accounts of the Prophet

God's prayer and blessing be upon him his conquests, the miracles God had
performed for him, and the wonders he was given to work: the divine victory
and help which were granted him in the battles of Badr, Khaybar, and others;
the story of his beginnings in orphanhood and wretchedness: the animosity of
his own people toward him while he stood up to his adversaries over a period

32 Aflakl, Manaqib al 'arifin, trans. James W. Redhouse as Legends of tfte Sufis, 3rd edn
(London, 1976), p. 88 (transliteration modified).

33 See M. Cooperson, 'Probability, plausibility, and "spiritual communication" in classical
Arabic biography', in Philip F. Kennedy (ed.), On fiction and adab in medieval Arabic
literature (Wiesbaden, 2005). The citation is from Shams al Din al Dhahabi, Siyar a'lam
al nubala', vol. XI, ed. Salih al Samr (Beirut, 1304/1982), p. 353.

Biographical literature

of many years, rejecting their faith openly and calling them to his own, until
God permitted him to migrate to Medina; what calamities befell his enemies,
who were slain before him by the swords of his supporters at Badr and elsewhere. 34

After reading the slra al Samaw'al was visited by the Prophet in a dream, and
soon after converted from Judaism to Islam. His description of his experience
as a reader of biography is one of the few such accounts to be found in the pre
modern sources.

Modern scholarship has discerned at least three layers of narrative and other
material in the slra: memories, more or less well preserved, dating back to the
time of the Prophet; legendary and polemical elaborations dating back to the
first generations of Islam; and a final set of modifications reflecting the pro
'Abbasid milieu of the compilers. 35 The legendary element, present even in the
earliest versions, increased with the passage of time. For modern historians
the later siyar are therefore useful only as a guide to the image of the Prophet
in the minds of the faithful. For pre modern Muslims, however, the compo
sition of siyar seems to have been both an act of piety and a scholarly rite of
passage. The tradition was trans regional and multilingual: a list of the most
popular versions includes both al Skifa' (The remedy) by al Qadi 'Iyad (d. 544/
1149), written in Arabic in al Andalus, and the Madarij al nubuwwa (The stages
of prophethood) by 'Abd al Haqq Dihlavi (d. 1052/1642), written in Persian in
India.

Although the Prophet was the first and most popular subject of stand alone
biographies, he was not the only one. Prominent scholars such as Ibn Hanbal
and al ShafiT, Shi'ite imams such as 'All al Rida and rulers such as Saladin and
Baybars also inspired (or, in the case of rulers, sometimes merely paid for)
independent works, called slra or manaqib ('virtues') devoted to the commem
oration of their careers. This treatment of character permits the occasional
deployment of non chronological forms of exposition, including thematic
chapters on the subject's personal habits, for example, or his legal opinions.
To the sua writers' credit, their expositions sometimes contain enough detail
to permit modern readers to discern a trajectory of character development.

But such trajectories are never the point of the story. The point is rather to
document a manifestation of an ideal type: the pious scholar, for example, or

34 Samaw'al al Maghribi, Ifham al yahud ed. and trans. Moshe Perlmann as Silencing the
Jews, in Proceedings of the American Academy for Jewish Research, 32 (1964), pp. 101 2

(Arabic) 78 9 (English), translation slightly modified.

35 Rudolf Sellheim, 'Prophet, Calif, und Geschichte: Die Muhammed Biographie des Ibn
Ishaq', Oriens, 18 19 (1967).

the just ruler. What makes these productions interesting is that the idealised
subject must make his way through a non idealised world. In Ibn al Jawzfs
Manaqib of Ibn Hanbal, for example, the hero is the perfect exemplar oihadlth
scholarship. But he lives in a specific place and time the Harbiyya quarter of
Baghdad in the first half of the third /ninth century surrounded by a varied
cast of contemporaries: devoted disciples, embittered relatives, troublesome
neighbours, mischievous grandchildren and truculent caliphs. As he moves
through this vividly detailed world we see saintliness manifested or imag ined in specific historical circumstances.

Autobiography

Also problematic is autobiography, which some critics have characterised as a
distinctively Western genre. These critics evidently believe that autobiogra

phy must be confessional: that is, it must be concerned with exposing the
private reality that lies behind the author's public persona. But if we accept
another definition, that of the Muslim authors who claimed to be 'speaking of
the blessings of God' (an allusion to Q 93:11) in their lives, we find a great many
texts that count as autobiographies: as many as 120 in Arabic alone, according
to a recent survey that stops at the year 1900. 36 Many of these are merely
tarajim written in the first person, and consist of a list of the author's teachers
and students and a bibliography of his works. Others, however, contain
accounts of the author's childhood, reports of his dreams, and selections
from his poetry. Although not explicitly confessional, these scholarly self
tarajim use the coded language of dreams and poems to express a sense
of self.
In some cases the author's personality emerges quite clearly, as in the long and
polemical thematic autobiography by the jurist al Suyuti. 37

Alongside the scholarly self tarjama run several other strains of autobio
graphical writing. Inspired by the Persian and Greek traditions, many physi
cians and philosophers, including Hunayn ibn Ishaq (d. 260/873?), al Razi
(d. 313/925) and Ibn Sina (d. 428/1037), wrote full or partial autobiographies.
One such account, the autobiography of the physician Ibn Ridwan (d. 453/1061),

36 Dwight F. Reynolds et al. , Interpreting the self: Autobiography in tfte Arabic literary tradition
(Berkeley, 2001), which also contains references to Persian and Ottoman autobiographies.

37 Elizabeth Sartain, Jalal al Din al Suyuti: vol. I: Biography and background, vol. II:
al Tahadduth bi ni'mat Allah (Cambridge, 1975); Kristen Brustad, 'Imposing order:
Reading the conventions of representation in al Suyuti' s autobiography', Edebiydt:
Special Issue Arabic Autobiography, n.s. 7, 2 (1997); Reynolds et al., Interpreting the self,
pp. 202 7.

Biographical literature

is notable for its discussion of his troubled domestic life. A second type of self
narrative is the spiritual autobiography, notably the conversion accounts of al
Muhasibi (d. 243/857), al Hakim al Tirmidhi(d. between 295/905 and 300/910),
al Simnam (d. 736/1336) and al Sha'ranl (d. 973/1565). The best known exam
pie, the autobiography of al Ghazali (d. 505/1111), describes the author's
disenchantment with philosophy, his search for truth among the representa
tives of various schools of thought, and his eventual decision to embrace the
mystic path by virtue of a light that God cast into his heart. Finally, there is the
memoir, composed by witnesses to and sometimes participants in note
worthy events. Examples include the works of Ibn Buluqqin (d. 488/1095), the
last Zrrid ruler of Granada; Usama ibn Munqidh (d. 584/1188), who provides a
description of the European Crusaders; and 'Imad al Din al Isfahan! (d. 597/
1201), whose account of Saladin's reign emphasises his own role in the events
he describes. Works of this type are sometimes difficult to separate from the
autobiographies of historians, such as those by Abu Shama (d. 665/1267), a
historian of Damascus; and Ibn Khaldun (d. 808/1406), whose autobiography
originally an appendix to his work on history records his meeting with
Trmur Lang. 38 Memoirs are also difficult to separate from travel accounts,
which in some cases cover substantial periods of the author's life and contain
vivid reports of unusual experiences.

Outside the Arabic tradition, the most famous memoirs are those of Babur

(d. 937/1530), a Timurid prince who founded what later became known as the
Mughal dynasty of India. Written in Chaghatay (the spoken language of the
Timurids) rather than literary Persian, the partially preserved text follows
Babur' s fortunes from his assumption of kingship at the age of twelve until the
period shortly before his death. Much of the work is devoted to history and
biography, and it includes keenly observed tarajim of princes, officers, finance
ministers, viziers, scholars, poets, calligraphers, painters and musicians.
Occasionally, however, Babur turns his sharp eye on himself. He describes
his marriage at the age of nineteen to a cousin, in whom he quickly lost
interest and would have neglected entirely if not for his mother, who every
month or so 'drove me to her with all the ferocity of a quartermaster'. Later he
describes his struggle to give up wine, which he eventually does, although he
continues to consume mcfjun, a chewable narcotic. Making no effort to
conceal his 'pretentions to rule' and 'desire for conquest', he speaks non
chalantly about flaying captives to death and constructing towers of enemy

38 A fuller account of all these texts, as well as translations of several of them, may be
found in Reynolds et al. , Interpreting the self.

skulls. His straightforward accounts of his campaigns convey a sense of his
charisma as a leader, as when he refuses to leave his troops and take shelter in

a cave during a snowstorm: 'Whatever hardship and difficulty there was,
I would suffer it too.' He is also honest about his errors in judgement,
which
he ascribes either to inexperience or to placing his trust in the wrong
people.
However, he insists that 'I have not written all this to complain: I have
simply
written the truth'. 39

The end of the tradition

In a very literal sense, the classical Islamic biographical tradition was
inter
rupted by the onset of modernity. The first Arabic account of Napoleon's
invasion of Egypt in 1798 appears in a biographical chronicle, al Jabarti's
c Aja'ib
al dihdr (The wonders of history), which turns abruptly from a list of
recently
deceased notables to a description of the French landing at Alexandria.
40 Of
course, the conventions survived for a time, sometimes in unexpected
places.
In the early nineteenth century three African slaves were manumitted in
the
United States when it was discovered that they were literate Muslims
who
could write in Arabic; all three composed short autobiographies in that
language. 41 'It is indeed a powerful moment of dejd vu to read in the
terse
autobiographical writings of a person considered mere chattel in
nineteenth
century America formulas and phraseology reminiscent of those used by
medieval philosophers, religious scholars, and princes centuries earlier.'
42.

Since the early twentieth century literary biography and autobiography
have been influenced by Western models, although spontaneous oral
produc
tions can still seem quite classical in form if not in content. In a recent
study of
tribal history in Jordan the anthropologist Andrew Shryock describes
urging
his informant Shaykh Khalaf to talk about himself. After some hesitation,
the
shaykh recites an account that begins not with his birth but rather with
his

genealogy. The persistence of classical forms should not, however, be taken to
mean that their content is somehow exempt from history. In one case, Shryock reports that his efforts to elicit more than a bare genealogy failed

39 The Baburnama: Memoirs ofBabur, prince and emperor, trans. Wheeler M. Thackston, Jr.
(New York, 2002), pp. 89, 67, 234, 241.

40 al Jabarti, Ta'nfeft 'aja'ib al atharfial tarajim wa al akhbar, 3 vols. (Beirut, c. 1970), vol. II,
p. 179; al Jabarti, 'Abd al Rahman al Jabarti's History of Egypt, 5 vols, in 3, ed. Thomas
Philipp and Moshe Perlmann (Stuttgart, 1994), vol. Ill (trans. Thomas Philipp), p. 1.

41 For discussion and references see Reynolds et al., Interpreting the self, pp. 56 7.

42 Ibid., p. 8.

472

Biographical literature

because his informants were unable 'to negotiate an acceptable version' of
tribal history. 43 Classical biographies, whether in Arabic, Persian or Turkic, are
doubtless the result of similar (albeit more successful) negotiations between
competing impulses, among them the contradictory demands of documentary
accuracy and literary delectation.

43 Andrew Shryock, Nationalism and the genealogical imagination: Oral history and textual
authority in trihaljordan (Berkeley, 1997), pp. 12, 108. For more examples of modern oral
self presentations in Arabic see Gary S. Gregg, Culture and identity in Morocco (Oxford,
2007).

19

Muslim accounts of the ddr al-harb

MICHAEL BONNER AND GOTTFRIED HAGEN

Muslim knowledge about the non Muslim world, or the ddr al harb (abode of
war), was living knowledge. Its bearers who included state officials, mer
chants, converts to Islam, Muslim captives in foreign lands, spies and adven
turers tended to circulate this knowledge informally and orally. 1 Since most
of this material has now been lost, we are left with writings that have been
preserved in literary texts, whether independently or incorporated into larger
works. Most of these fall within the classical definition of ta'rikh, and can be
described in modern terms as geographical, cosmographical, historical, bio
graphical, autobiographical or ethnographic. 2 This chapter will survey these
writings in their social and intellectual contexts. It is structured according to
the literary genres in which they appear. However, we must keep in mind that
these accounts do not constitute one or several genres in and of themselves.

They also show practically no limitation in their subject matter and themes:
since the travellers and compilers were interested in nearly everything, from
mundane observations to spectacular marvels, it is virtually impossible to link
particular themes to specific formal categories of texts. 3

Knowledge about the ddr al harb was not part of the accepted canon of
Islamic knowledge, and since information of this kind was usually obtained by
individuals who lacked institutional backing or intellectual prestige, it was
often contested, neglected or ignored. 4 Furthermore, the number of texts in
question is small, both in comparison with Islamic literature in general, and

i Suraiya Faroqhi, The Ottoman empire and the world around it (London, 2004), on the
Ottoman case.

2 Hajji Khalifa (Katib Celebi), Kashfal zunun 'an asami I kutub walfunun, ed. K. R. Bilge and
§. Yaltkaya, 2 vols. (Istanbul, 1941 3), p. 271; cf. Franz Rosenthal, A history of Muslim
historiography (Leiden, 1968).

3 Daniel Newman, Arab travellers to Europe until the end of the eighteenth century and
their accounts: Historical overview and themes', Chronos, 4 (2001).

4 Houari Touati, Islam et voyage au moyen age: Histoire et anthropologic d'une pratique lettree
(Paris, 2000), p. 16.

Muslim accounts of the dar al harb

with European travelogues. 5 All this has led some modern writers to charac
terise the Muslims as relatively uninterested in other cultures. However, we
need to account for the conditions of production and transmission of cultural
knowledge within the Muslim world itself.

Cultural boundaries

The division of the world into an abode of Islam (dar al islam) and abode of war
(dar al harb) does not appear in the Qur'an, and does not necessarily correspond
to the conceptions of the earliest Muslim society. 7 We first find it in juridical texts
of the late second/ eighth century. After being developed by al Shafrl (d. 204/
820) and other jurists it became an accepted way of representing the world. Here,
as the vocabulary indicates, the two abodes are in a permanent condition of war.
Since the only legitimate sovereign is God, and the only legitimate political
system is Islam, the various rulers within the dar al harb have no legitimacy, and
their rule is mere oppression and tyranny. The Muslim state in the classical
theory, the imam may conclude a truce with them for a limited period.
Individuals from the dar al harb who wish to visit the dar al islam, especially for
purposes of trade or diplomacy, may be granted safe conduct (aman) for a time.
Since, however, Muslim states did often live in peace with their non Muslim
neighbours for prolonged periods, some jurists recognised an intermediate
abode of truce or treaty (dar al sulh, dar al ^ahd). 9 On the whole, however, the
two part distinction remained in force, especially regarding diplomatic relations
with non Muslim states, well into the twelfth/ eighteenth century. 10

This chapter will show that literature on the dar al harb, from the third/

ninth century until the thirteenth/nineteenth, was shaped not only by the
juridical distinction between the two abodes, but also by a variety of
cultural,
religious, political, linguistic, geographical astronomical and historical
boun
daries. These intersected with the juridical boundary in multiple ways,
but
were mostly not coterminous with it. Other recent discussions have
similarly

5 Muzaffar Alam and Sanjay Subrahmanyam, Indo Persian travels in the
age of the discoveries,
1400 1800 (Cambridge, 2006), pp. 244, 358.

6 Bernard Lewis, Tfie Muslim discovery of Europe (New York, 1982).

7 Michael Bonner, Jihad in Islamic history (Princeton, 2006).

8 Roy Mottahedeh and Ridwan al Sayyid, 'The idea of jihad in Islam
before the Crusades',
in A. E. Laiou and R. P. Mottahedeh (eds.), The Crusades from the
perspective of Byzantium
and the Muslim world (Washington, DC, 2001).

9 Halil Inalcik, 'Dar al 'ahd', Eh, vol. II, p. 116.

10 Virginia Aksan, An Ottoman statesman in war and peace: Ahmed
Resmi Efendi, 1700 17X3
(Leiden, 1995), p. 45.

475

The New Cambridge History of Islam

argued that the opposition of Islam /not Islam was only one set within a
larger
system of 'nested polarities' which travellers and audiences deployed in
the
assertion of their identities."

As a pragmatic starting point we may visualise the mental map of Muslim travellers and geographers as a series of concentric circles. The innermost circle includes regions that are culturally and linguistically familiar. Then, moving out, we come to a second circle encompassing areas adjacent to the first, recognisable but significantly different. Then we arrive at the outer circle, the fringes of the world, a zone of monstrous creatures and bizarre phenom ena, impossible to measure by any familiar standards. 12. Here we find what von Mzik defined as parageographical elements, deriving from speculation rather than empirical observation. 13 An example is the encyclopaedic Nuzhat al qulub, composed by Hamdallah Mustawfi (d. after 740/1339^. The geographical section of this work 14 focuses on the Islamic lands and provides first hand information, on Ilkhanid Iran in particular. Other, separate chapters on marvels and wonders deal almost exclusively with the outer margins.

Accordingly, the frontier of the abode of Islam did not coincide with the frontier of the familiar and the domestic. After all, the production of knowl edge about the 'other' could refer to regions and peoples located within the abode of Islam itself. Likewise, India, though at least partly under Muslim rule, belonged to the periphery (the middle circle). If we look at the dar al barb from an Islamic Middle Eastern perspective, we find that it includes parts of the periphery together with most of the outer fringe. From this point of view, three broad areas were objects of sustained interest: the east and north east, including China and Inner Asia and extending to the land of Gog and Magog; the north west, i.e. Christian Europe; and the south, i.e. sub Saharan Africa and various islands in the southern regions of the Indian Ocean which came, at a late date, to include the Americas.

11 Roxanne Euben, Journeys to the other shore: Muslim and Western travelers in search of
knowledge (Princeton, 2006), pp. 75 8 and passim.

12 Pmar Emiralioglu, 'Cognizance of the Ottoman world: Visual and textual representa
tions in the sixteenth century Ottoman empire (1514 1596)', Ph.D. dissertation,
University of Chicago (2006), pp. 16, 274, speaks of core, central and peripheral zones
for the Ottoman classical age, a pattern which we may apply more generally.

13 Hans von Mzik, 'Parageographische Elemente in den Berichten der arabischen
Geographen uber Siidostasien', in H. von Mzik (ed.), Beitrage zur historischen
Geographie, Kulturgeographie, Ethnographie, und Kartographie (Leipzig and Vienna, 1929);
Hans von Mzik, 'Mythische Geographie', Wiener Zeitschrift fir die Kunde des
Morgenlandes, 45 (1938).

14 Hamdallah Mustawfi al Qazwini, The geographical part of the Nuzhat al qulub composed by
Hamd allah Mustawfi, ed. and trans. G. Le Strange, 2 vols. (Leiden and London, 1915 19).

Muslim accounts of the dar a\ harb

All these boundaries are dynamic. In the Middle Eastern heartlands, pre Islamic
monuments serve as reminders of an Egyptian, Iranian or Mesopotamian past.
Over time the boundary between periphery and margin typically shifts outward,
so that by the end of our period the margin (the outer circle) has all but
disappeared. In the eleventh/ seventeenth century Ilyas ibn Hanna alMawall

narrates his American journey as occurring in a distant land; however, this land
appears far less exotic than it did less than two centuries previously in the Turkish
History of the West Indies. At the same time, the border between the abodes of
Islam and war sometimes contracted, as in the Spanish reconquista, so that what
had formerly been part of the core became peripheral once again. In these ways
the mental map shaped and reshaped the travel reports and other geographical
literature, which also shaped the mental map in turn, by creating literary norms
and expectations.

Ptolemy

Among the geographical traditions available to the early Muslims, that of the
second century Greek astronomer and geographer Ptolemy was the least
concerned with political and cultural boundaries. Ptolemy's influence appears
in his concept of clime (Gr. Mima, Ar. iqlim), which Muslim geographers
deployed in a variety of ways. 15 Ptolemy used astronomical data and calcu
lations to divide each half of the globe into seven parallel zones of equal
latitude. Many Muslim geographers used this seven part division, which
extended over both the inhabited and uninhabited 'quarters' of the world.
For the most part, however, texts in this tradition offered little by way of
ethnographic information or portraits of cultural regions.

A smaller number of geographical writers used the Ptolemaic iqlim as a
near synonym for the Persian kishwar. In this view, the world consists of seven
circles, each corresponding to an empire (China, Rome etc.) with Iran in the
central position. Here, of course, we are dealing with political rather than
astronomical entities. 1 In any case, writers who divided the world according
to iqlim or kishwar did not make a fundamental distinction between Muslim

15 Wadie Jwaideh (ed. and trans.), The introductory chapters of Yaqut's Mu'jam al buldan
(Leiden, 1959), pp. 26 52; Fuat Sezgin, Mathematical geography and cartography in Islam,
trans. G. Moore and G. Sammon, 3 vols. (Frankfurt, 2000 7).

16 Ahmet Karamustafa, 'Military, administrative, and scholarly maps and plans', in J. B.
Harley and D. Woodward (eds.), The history of cartography, vol. II/i (Chicago, 1992),
pp. 209 27.

477

The New Cambridge History of Islam

and non Muslim lands and cultures, since both of these could (and did) occur
within the same clime.

A Ptolemaic grid forms the background for the geographical work of al Idrisi, composed during the 1150s at the court of Roger II of Sicily. 17 Like his
successor Ibn Sa'Id al Maghribi, al Idrisi follows Ptolemy in that he provides a
commentary on a map or series of maps, though in fact al Idrisi did not have
the skills or inclinations of an astronomical geographer. He used an array of
written Arabic sources, but at the same time his coverage of non Muslim regions, western and northern Europe in particular, stands out in Islamic literature for its volume and detail. Some have thought that al Idrisi actually
travelled to such places as France and Britain, 1 but it seems more likely that he
consulted informants, typically French speaking, who were available to him at
the Norman court in Palermo. 19 The detail that al Idrisi devotes to the dar al
harb results from the format of his work (proceeding from a Ptolemaic world

map), but also from his unusual position as a Muslim beneficiary of the patronage of a Christian monarch. Al Idrisi did not have many imitators afterwards, although some Muslim authors (Ibn Khaldun in particular) expressed admiration for him. Later works in the tradition of Ptolemaic geography, such as Abu al Fida''s Taqwim al buldan, tended to focus more
on the dar al islam.

Imperial administration and the 'atlas of Islam'

Bureaucrats in the service of the c Abbasid caliphate and its successor states
composed comprehensive geographical works. An early example is the Book of
routes and realms by Ibn Khurradadhbih (d. c. 300/911). 2 ° While Ibn Khurradadhbih claims to have access to Ptolemy's work, in reality he has little use for it. His book is organised (loosely) according to the stages of the
imperial post, following the great trunk routes. However, Ibn Khurradadhbih
does not halt at the borders of Islam. He includes a section on the Byzantine
empire, which modern historians have used for reconstructing the empire's

17 Muhammad al Idrisi, Nuzhat al mushtaq ft ikhtiraq al afaq, 9 fascicles (Naples, 1970 84),
often known as the Book of Roger.

18 I. J. Krachkovskii, Izbraniye sochineniya, vol. IV: Arabskaya geograficheskaya literatura
(Moscow and Leningrad, 1957), p. 182.

19 Al Idrisi calls England 'the island of Angleterre': A. F. L. Beeston, 'Idrisi's account of the
British Isles', BSOAS, 13 (1950).

20 Ibn Khurradadhbih, Kitab al masalik wa'l mamalik, ed. M. J. de Goeje, EGA, vol. VI
(Leiden, 1889).

Muslim accounts of the dar al harb

administrative structures. By contrast, his accounts of other parts of the non
Muslim world tend more towards the marvellous and the fantastical.

Another work in this tradition dates from the first half of the fourth/tenth
century, the Book of the land tax and the secretary's art by the Baghdad admin
istrator Qudama ibnja'far. Qudama's seventh chapter provides a tour of the
frontiers of Islam (thughur al islam). 2 ' 1 Here Qudama makes no mention of the
juridical division of the world into abodes of Islam and war, but presents a
hierarchical vision of the frontiers. 'Islam', he says, 'is surrounded on all sides
and directions by nations and peoples who are hostile to it, some of them near
to and others far away from its imperial capital (dar mamlakatihi).' Since the
Romans (Byzantines) are the oldest and most dangerous of these, 'it behoves
the Muslims to be most wary and on their guard against the Romans, from
among all the ranks of their adversaries'. As in Ibn Khurradadhbih, the
description of Byzantium and its frontier is relatively detailed and matter of
fact; Qudama inclines more towards the fantastical as he moves from the
borders of the caliphate to the outer fringes of the world. In any case, all these
regions appear as lands to be conquered. The near periphery basically,
Byzantium is characterised by stubborn opposition, whereas the outer
reaches such as Tibet and China are more amenable to conquest, especially
since, in the past, Alexander the Great has already shown the way (see below).

Away from the chanceries and archives, we find a different approach in al
Jahiz (d. 255/8681".), who apparendy wrote a geographical work which, how
ever, has not survived. Al Jahiz emphasised travel and personal observation,

and was interested in researching relations among humans, their society and
the surrounding environment. It is likely that this book did not deal much with
the non Muslim world. 22 Later writers who took up al Jahiz' s programme,
however, did devote attention to the world beyond Islam. Prominent among
these was al Mas'udi (d. 355 or 356/956^, who travelled widely and relayed
information on Africa, China and western Europe.

Also in the fourth/ tenth century came the three authors sometimes known
as the 'Balkhi school', after the first in the series, Abu Zayd al Balkhi (d. c. 322/
934). 23 These men devoted their lives to travel, observation and map making.
They deployed the Ptolemaic iqlim, but made no claim to astronomical

21 Qudama ibn Ja'far, al Kharaj wa sina'at al kitaba, ed. H. al Zubaydi (Baghdad, 1981),
pp. 185 203.

22 Andre Miquel, La geograpMe humaine du monde musulman jusqu'au milieu du lie siecle,
4 vols. (Paris and The Hague, 1967 88), vol. I, pp. 57 9.

23 The other two are authors of surviving books, al Istakhri (d. after 340/951), and Ibn
Hawqal, who completed his work around 378/988.

The New Cambridge History of Islam

precision. Instead they developed a programme, already anticipated by al Jahiz,

of what we may call human geography. 24 They deliberately limited themselves
to observing and describing the Islamic world. At the same time they con
strutted their books around a set of beautifully drawn (though mathematically
imprecise) maps, usually numbered at twenty one. For this reason, their work is
sometimes (perhaps misleadingly) known as 'the adas of Islam'. At any rate,
since Balkhi school cartography covered all the known world, its maps and,
following them, its texts had to account for the fact that many of the world's
spaces, especially the seas, were shared between Muslims and non Muslims.
Accordingly, these authors make observations about non Muslims, more or less
in passing as they proceed. The same applies to their contemporary al
Muqaddasi, 25 who broadly shared their methods and concerns.

Writing in the service of Mahmud of Ghazna, but extending his interest far
beyond administrative interests, to physical geography, language, religion and
philosophy, was al BTrum (d. after 442/1050). His oudook as court astronomer
and scientist proudly emphasises his first hand knowledge, including fluency
in Sanskrit, which he acquired during Ghaznavid military campaigns into
northern India. 2

Embassies

In Islamic legend Alexander the Great is the paradigmatic conqueror
explorer. He sent out ships to discover what lies beyond the oceans, he
subdued the monarchs of India, Tibet and China, and he confined Gog and
Magog behind an iron wall. This may explain why it happened that when the
'Abbasid caliph al Wathiq (r. 227 32/842 7) saw in a dream that this wall had
been breached, he sent out an expedition to check on it. 27 In the account of this
expedition, the delegation moves from princely court to princely court, until it
finds itself in the wastelands of the world's outer margins. Even there,

24 Miquel, La geographic humaine, vol. I, pp. 35 6 and passim.

25 Muqaddasf s Ahsan al taqdsim li ma'rifat al aqalim, ed. M. J. de Goeje, EGA, vol. Ill
(Leiden, 1877) was composed in the last decades of the fourth/tenth century. It has
been translated by Basil Collins as The best divisions for knowledge of the regions (Reading,
2001).

26 D. J. Boilot, 'al Birunl (Berunl), Abu '1 Rayhan b. Ahmad', Eh vol. I, p. 1236; Eduard
Sachau (ed.), al Beruni's India: An aeeount of the religion, philosophy, literature, chronology,
astronomy, customs, laws and anthropology of India about AD 1030 (London, 1887; repr.
Leipzig, 1925), English trans. Eduard Sachau under the same title, 2 vols. (London, 1888
1910).

27 Ibn Khurradadhbih, Kitab al masalik, pp. 162 70. For Alexander's exploits see also
Qudama ibn Ja'far, al Kharaj, pp. 192 200.

480

Muslim accounts of the dar al barb

however, they find people who are Muslims, speak Arabic and are delighted to
hear of the existence of a caliph in Baghdad.

In 309/921 the caliph al Muqtadir sent an embassy to the Bulghars of the Volga, far to the north. The account of this expedition follows a political paradigm rooted in narratives of slra and maghazi, namely, the linking of political alliances across the frontier with the conversion of people who live
outside the dar al islam. One of the participants, Ibn Fadlan, left a travelogue
which intertwines diplomacy together with the role of the missionary who

instructs the foreign ruler in the principles of Islam. Ibn Fadlan's ethnographic
observations also privilege areas of interest to a legal scholar: the dispensation
of justice, the performance of pagan rituals (including funerary rites) and the
arrival of correct practice among the recent converts. 2 All the while, Ibn Fad
Ian was aware of a steep cultural gradient between the highly civilised
Abbasid caliphate and (as he portrays them) the uncouth peoples of the north.

Another embassy report, written centuries later in Persian, builds upon a
similar notion. Muhammad RabF's Safina yi Sulaymani, describing a Safavid
embassy to Thailand in 1685 8, is imbued with the spirit of Iranian superiority.
In its constructed dichotomy of Iranian culture versus local barbarism it goes
so far as to state that the Siamese had only recently turned from the realm of
bestiality to that of humankind. 29

Such contacts were rare enough that an account of them could attract
attention for its unusual, even exotic, contents. On the other hand, the
Trmurid monarch Shah Rukh exchanged no fewer than twenty embassies
with Ming China between 1408 and 1428. 3 ° Only one of these, in 1420, left a
literary trace, in a report by Ghiyath al Din Naqqash. This account became a
classic, preserved in a long series of literary works in Persian and Turkic. 31
Ghiyath al Din had encountered a refined civilisation, and his interest
in administrative and judicial practices set a precedent for future accounts
of China.

Despite the number and intensity of these diplomatic contacts in the eastern
Islamic world, they had surprisingly few reflections in literature. Much the

28 Richard Frye, Ibn Fadlan's journey to Russia: A tenth century traveler from Baghdad to the
Volga River (Princeton, 2006).

29 Alam and Subrahmanyan, Indo Persian travels, pp. 159 71, esp. p. 167.

30 B. Forbes Manz, 'Shah Rukh', Eh, vol. IX, pp. 197 8.

31 C. A. Storey and Yuri Bregel', Persidskaya literatura: Bio bibliograficheskii obzor (Moscow,
1972), p. 824; Ildiko Beller Hann, A history of Cathay: A translation and linguistic analysis of
a fifteenth century Turkic manuscript (Bloomington, 1995); Krachkovskii, Arabskaya geo
graficheskaya literatura, pp. 518 22.

481

The New Cambridge History of Islam

same happened in the west, where dozens of embassies went from Tunisia
and Morocco to European countries between 1600 and 1800. 32 Ahmad ibn
Qasim al Hajari (d. after 1051/ 1641) served as a translator for the Spanish king,
and afterwards as a diplomat for the dispossessed Moriscos. His travelogue,
which includes many keen observations, is characterised by Islamic apolo
getics, summarised in its title and borne out in its accounts of religious
disputations held with Christians and Jews along the way. 33

Most of the accounts discussed so far had little or no official character.
Returning embassies were expected to submit reports, especially regarding
the respect they had been shown by foreign rulers. Hence, the official report is
a part of the envoy's negotiation of his re entry into his own society and
order. 34 'Xenology' 35 provides additional arguments: Muhammad Rate's
picture of cultural depravity in Thailand may have served to rationalise the
failure of his diplomatic mission.

Ottoman agents went to Europe on various occasions, for instance to keep
track of the pretender Jem Sultan, who found asylum with the Pope in his
competition against his brother Bayazid II (r. 886 918/1481 I5i2). 36 Yet it was
only in the eleventh/ seventeenth century that regular diplomatic missions
went out to European capitals, beginning in the aftermath of the Ottoman
defeat at St Gotthard in 1665. The report of this mission, documented in two
chronicles, focused entirely on its diplomatic aspect. 37 In the following gen
eration the Ottoman Habsburg Treaty of Karlowitz in 1699 put a de facto end
to the conceptualisation of relations in the juridical terms of the abodes of

32 The focus shifted from ransoming captives to trade and peace agreements: see
Newman, 'Arab travellers', p. 32.

33 Ahmad ibn Qasim al Hajari, Kitab ndsir al din 'aid I qawm al kdfirin, ed. and trans. P. S. van
Koningsveld, A. al Samarrai and G. A. Wiegers (Madrid, 1997). See also Gerard Wiegers,
A life between Europe and the Maghrib: The writings and travels of Ahmad b. Qasim
ibn al faqih ibn al shaykh al Hajari al Andalusf , in G.J. van Gelder and E. de Moor (eds.),
The Middle East and Europe: Encounters and exchanges (Amsterdam, 1992); Nabil Matar, In
the land of the Christians: Arabic travel writing in the seventeenth century (New York and
London, 2003).

34 Nicolas Vatin, 'Pourquoi un Turc racontait il son voyage? Note sur les relations de
voyage chez les Ottomans des Vdki'dt 1 Sultan Cent au Seydhatndme d'Evliya C^elebi', in
Etudes turqu.es et ottomanes: Document de travail no. 4 de I'URA du CNRS (decembre 1995)
(Paris, 1995).

35 Alam and Subrahmanyam, Indo Persian travels, p. 12.

36 The report on Jem is edited by Nicolas Vatin in Sultan Djem: Un prince ottoman dans

l'Europe du XVe siecle d'dpres deux sources contemporaines: Vdkt'dt 1
Sultan Cent, CEuvres de
Guillaume Caoursin (Ankara, 1997).

37 Faik Resit Unat and Bekir Sitki Baykal, Osmanlt sefirleri ve
sefaretnameleri (Ankara, 1968),
pp. 47f.

482

Muslim accounts of the dar a\ harb

Islam and of war, even though this rhetoric continued to shape Ottoman
diplomatic discourse for at least another century. 38

Meanwhile, embassy reports (sefaretname) developed into a literary
genre
which had a profound cultural impact, and despite its newness showed
surprising maturity by the time of Yirmisekiz Celebi Mehmed's report on
his embassy to Paris in 1721. 39 This work shows interest in a variety of
cultural
productions and scientific activities, including theatre and opera, the
Paris
observatory and various manufactures, all reported without any
noticeable
religious objections or concerns. Since the report circulated as a literary
text
rather than an official document, its diplomatic purpose became of
secondary
importance. Yirmisekiz Mehmed seems aware of his position as an exotic
object of interest for the Parisians. On the other hand, his work has been
identified as a blueprint for transformations within the Ottoman empire,
coinciding with the so called Tulip Era and its innovations in the spirit of
a
'new worldliness'. 40

Subsequent embassy reports followed the pattern set by Yirmisekiz
Mehmed
in privileging cultural exploration over diplomatic negotiation. In most
cases,

the diplomatic report provided the basis for a longer, descriptive account. These
are read today as documents of perceptions of others or 'occidentalism', and
indeed they offer many insights into cross cultural encounters, from Ahmed
Resmfs Machiavellian characterisation of Frederick II of Prussia to the obser
vations of Ebu Bekr Ratib on Austrian administration, to Mustafa Rasih's critique
of Russian serfdom. Embassy reports also suited an agenda for domestic reform. 41

Travelogues similar to the Ottoman sefaretname were produced in India in
the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, often by authors who, in the
course of their official duties, accompanied Englishmen back to their
homeland. Mfrza Abu Talib Khan's Masir, a successful work which was

38 Berrak Burcak, 'The institution of the Ottoman embassy and eighteenth century
Ottoman history', International journal of Turkish Studies 13, 1 2 (2007); Aksan, An
Ottoman statesman, p. 45.

39 First printed as Sefdret name i Fransa: Eseri Mehmed Efendi (Istanbul, 1283/ 1866), with
numerous reprints in Arabic and Latin characters.

40 Fatma Miige Gocek, East encounters West: France and the Ottoman empire in the eighteenth
century (New York, 1987); Niyazi Berkes, The development of secularism in Turkey
(Montreal, 1964).

41 Aksan, An Ottoman statesman; Stephan Conermann, 'Das Eigene und das Fremde: Der
Bericht der Gesandtschaft Mustafa Rasihs nach St Petersburg im Jahre 1792 1794',
Archivum Ottomanicum, 17 (1999); Carter Findley, 'Ebu Bekir Ratib's Vienna embassy
narrative: Discovering Austria or propagandizing for reform in Istanbul?', Wiener
Zeitschrift fur die Kunde des Morgenlandes, 85 (1995).

The New Cambridge History of Islam

immediately translated into English, became a prime example of how an additional, refracting layer could be added to the mutual perception of European colonialism and its 'oriental' subjects. 42

By the nineteenth century diplomats no longer held a monopoly over travel
to Europe. Trainees in the reformed administration of the Ottoman empire, as
well as of its (nominal) province Egypt, were sent to study in France. One of
these, the Egyptian cleric Rifa c a Ran 1 al Tahtawi, wrote a travelogue on his
stay in Paris from 1826 to 1831. 43 In its combination of cultural exploration
together with a search for models for social and political reform, al Tahtawfs
work had much in common with the Turkish sefaretnames of the eighteenth
century. It included translations of French texts, including the constitution of
1830, and it played a crucial role in the formation of modern literary Arabic, as
al Tahtawi negotiated the tension between his own classical erudition and the
need for expressions of new ideas. Afterwards al Tahtawi became influential in
Egyptian educational reform. Subsequently, reports on Europe by scholars,
diplomats and journalists produced a variegated discourse on modernity, reform and the Islamic tradition. 44

Individual travellers

Western travellers often ventured beyond their familiar world in pursuit of a
'hermeneutics of the other', in which they encountered themselves and

translated their experiences into their own cultural terms. Islamic travellers,
by contrast, generally preferred to seek knowledge from established scholars,
in their constant movements across the abode of Islam. 45 However, this pattern did not prevent individuals from venturing across political, religious
and cultural boundaries. Their motives included the pursuit of blessing (baraka) at remote sanctuaries, career goals, wanderlust (which Evliya Celebi described as divinely ordained) and simple happenstance. 46

42 Krachkovskii, Arabskaya geograficheskaya literatura, p. 535; Alam and Subrahmanyan,
Indo Persian travels, pp. 2456°.; Juan Cole, 'Invisible occidentalism: Eighteenth century
Indo Persian construction of the West', Iranian Studies 25 (1992).

43 Rifa'a Raff al Tahtawi, TakhUs al ibrizfi talkhis Bariz (Cairo, 1993), trans. Daniel Newman
as An imam in Paris: Account of a stay in Paris by an Egyptian cleric (1826 1831) (London, 2004).

44 Baki Asiltiirk, Osmanh seyyahlannin goziiyle Avrupa (Istanbul, 2000).

45 Touati, Islam et voyage, p. 11.

46 Euben, Journeys, p. 66, on Ibn Battuta. The trade and missionary activity that are so
compelling for Western travellers such as Marco Polo and William of Rubruck are
virtually absent in the Muslim travel authors.

484

Muslim accounts of the dar al harb

We have already noted a disparity between the number and intensity of the

encounters, on the one hand, and the paucity of literary accounts describing
them, on the other. Why, then, were certain experiences written about at all?
Touati has argued that literary travelogues were justified by the marvels that
one encountered along the way. If this is so, it must apply especially to travelogues from the outer periphery, the dwelling place of the extraordinary
and the abnormal. There, at the meeting place of edification and entertainment,
marvels (c ajaHV) are a basic concern, in conformance with the dictum of Abu
Bakr al 'Arab! (d. 543/1148) that the contemplation of the world should have
knowledge of God as its goal. 47 Accordingly, Abu Hamid al Gharnati collected
not only the marvels of the Maghrib, but also various other marvels he had
personally observed during his travels in Iran and the Eurasian steppes. 48

In contrast to the thematically arranged work of Abu Hamid, the chrono
logically arranged rihla (travelogue) shifted its focus onto the persona of the
traveller. First fully developed as a literary form by Ibn Jubayr (d. 614/1217),
the rihla reached far beyond the abode of Islam in the work of Ibn Battuta
(d. 770 or 779/1368 77), who travelled throughout the Middle East, East and
West Africa, Central Asia, China, India and South East Asia, with long stays in
Delhi and the Maldives, over almost thirty years. Modern researchers have
scrutinised this text for historical and cultural details. However, Ibn Battuta's
testimony, like that of many a geographer traveller, was considered suspect. 49
To deflect such charges he used an array of rhetorical strategies, including
emphasis on his piety, his status as a religious scholar, and the respect he was
shown in various foreign societies. However, these efforts proved vain. By
contrast, Abu Hamid al Gharnati remained immune to such suspicions, as many later authors cited his natural and ethnographic observations.

More broadly, the travelogue defies authorisation by intellectual geneal

ogy, a fundamental principle for valorisation of knowledge in medieval
Islam. 50 Al Muqaddasi was aware of this problem by the fourth/tenth
century,
and argues in favour of 'eyewitnessing' (lit. 'autopsy', Hyan) in the
production
of knowledge about the world's places. He proudly (and self
dramatisingly)
lists all the roles he has assumed during his travels. 51 His predecessor

47 Touati, Islam et voyage, p. 293.

48 On 'ajaHb (marvels) see below. On Abu Hamid see Cesar Emil Dubler,
Abu Hamid el
Granadino y su relation de viaje por tierras eurasiaticas: Texto drabe,
traduction
e interpretation (Madrid, 1953).

49 Euben, Journeys, p. 46.

50 Touati, Islam et voyage, p. 14.

51 al Muqaddasi, Ahsan al taqdsim, pp. 43f.; trans. Collins, pp. 4if.

al Mas'udi makes a similar argument, pointing to his experiences in
India,
Zanzibar, the Caspian and al Andalus. Both these writers (and al Ya'qubi
before them) developed systematic criteria for the selection of second
hand
reports to use in their description of the world. 52

The disregard for travel accounts lacking a respectable intellectual
genealogy
is exemplified by 'All Akbar's description of China, the Qanunname i
Khitay,

submitted in Persian to Sultan Siileyman I (r. 926 74/1520 66) and subsequently
translated into Turkish under Murad III (r. 982 1003/1574 95). 53 Despite this
high patronage, later geographers such as Katib Celebi (Hajji Khalifa, 1017 67/
1609 57) referred to All Akbar only with reluctance, because other scholars had
not validated his work.

It is Evliya Cdebi (d. after 1095/ 1683) who is Ibn Battuta's only competitor
for the title of 'greatest Muslim traveller'. In his ten volume travelogue he
gives a panorama of the Ottoman empire of his time, integrating administra
tive, historical and ethnographic data with personal anecdotes, in a delightful
range of prose styles. 54 Where he ventures beyond the Islamic world, as in his
participation in a mission to Vienna in 1665, Evliya sometimes gives fanciful
descriptions shaped by Ottoman imperial ideology, aiming at future conquest.
Explaining his experiences entirely in Ottoman terms, he advances a domestic
agenda, using the West as an example to criticise Ottoman faults. 55 At times
Evliya crosses over into fiction, as in his short narrative of a raid conducted by
40,000 Tatars through northern Europe, and his description of Sudan and
Ethiopia. 56 Evliya also takes pains to dispel his readers' doubts, offering precise
observations and emphasis on eyewitnessing as evidence for his own veracity.
Such rhetoric is often difficult to distinguish from irony, since Evliya
also includes thinly disguised hoaxes and obvious legends. 57 Nonetheless,
he shared Ibn Battuta's fate, since his work, though incomparably rich in

52 Touati, Islam et voyage, pp. 143 53. Suspicions of al Mas'udi persisted nonetheless, see
ibid., p. 151.

53 Emiralioglu, 'Cognizance of the Ottoman world', pp. 181 221.

54 Robert Dankoff, Evliya Qelebi: An Ottoman mentality (Leiden and Boston, 2004).

55 Richard Kreutel and Erich Prokosch, Im Reiche des goldenen Apfels: Des tiirkischen
Weltenbummlers Evliya QeUbi denkwiirdige Reise in das Giaurenland und in die Stadt und
Festung Wien anno 166} (Graz, Vienna and Cologne, 1985); Karl Teply, Tiirkische Sagen
und Legenden um die Kaiserstadt Wien (Vienna, Cologne and Graz, 1980).

56 Evliya Qelebi Seyahatnamesi, 10 vols. (Istanbul, 1896 1938), vol. X; Erich Prokosch, Ins
Land der geheimnisvollen Func: Des tiirkischen Weltenbummlers, Evliya Qelebi, Reise dureh
Oberdgypten und den Sudan nebst der osmanischen Frovinz Habes in denjahren 1672 /% (Graz,
1994)-

57 Dankoff, Evliya i^elebi.

486

Muslim accounts of the dar al harb

information, was never used in later descriptions of the Ottoman empire until
its 'rediscovery' by modern orientalists.

The Timurid prince Babur (r. 888 937/1483 1530), founder of the Mughal
dynasty, left an autobiographical account which included a description of India
through the eyes of its conqueror. Although India was technically not part of
the dar al harb, Babur perceived it as alien territory, to be ruled by Muslims in
exemplary fashion. 5

Captives

During the many centuries of conflict between Muslim and non Muslim states,
countless individuals were taken captive. Once they had escaped, or been ransomed, the former captives were theoretically well situated to provide information about their captors' lands. In early modern Europe, increasing literacy and the print revolution helped to make captivity narratives a much disseminated source of knowledge about the Islamic lands. In the Islamic lands, however, captivity narratives were rarer. Even more than travelogues, they remained outside the authorised canon of knowledge. Accordingly, even as more first person narratives come to light, we need to recall that these were not usually read as records of individual lives, in a culture that had an aversion to particularism. 59

An early example is Harun ibn Yahya, who was held prisoner in Constantinople some time around 900, and left a description of the city that gives valuable information on the city and its monuments. ° Harun then went on to visit and describe Rome and Venice. The sixteenth century Moroccan captive turned convert Leo Africanus provided Pope Leo with a description of Africa, written in an idiosyncratic Italian during his captivity in Rome, but he does not seem to have written an Arabic description of Italy after his return to his native land.

Ma'juncu zade Mustafa Efendi, who spent time in Malta as a prisoner of the Knights before being ransomed, transformed his experience into moral

58 Trans. Wheeler Thackston as The Baburnamd: Memoirs of Babur, prinee and emperor
(Washington, New York and Oxford, 1996).

59 Derin Terzioglu, 'Autobiography in fragments: Reading Ottoman personal miscellanies
in the early modern era', in O. Akyildiz, H. Kara and B. Sagaster (eds.), Autobiographical
themes in Turkish literature: Theoretical and comparative perspectives (Wiirzburg, 2007).

60 Ibn Rustah, al A'laq al nafisa, ed. M.J. de Goeje, BGA, vol. VII (Leiden,
1892), pp. 119 30;
M. Izzedin, 'Harun b. Yahya', Eh, vol. Ill, p. 232.

61 Natalie Zemon Davis, Trickster travels: A sixteenth century Muslim
between two worlds
(New York, 2006).

lessons. Sergiizeshti Malta (1010/1602) is woven around verses
composed
during the author's captivity, coping with surges of hope and despair,
and
invoking patience and trust in divine aid. There is little ethnographic
informa
tion here beyond details that illustrate the suffering of the captives, who
did
not get to see much of Malta in any case. 2

In an age of increasing individualism, 'Osman Aga of Temesvar (d. after
1725) had more to tell about his captivity. Once he had risen to a position
as
servant in an aristocratic household in Vienna (not untypically for the
period),
'Osman enjoyed aspects of his life, including an affair with a servant
maid,
training as a pastry maker and fights with servants of other households.
He
escaped to Ottoman territory after 1699. His work, in a distinctly
unliterary
Turkish, emphasises his merits as a translator and cultural mediator, and
it has
been suggested that he produced his autobiographical writings at the
request
of European diplomats in Istanbul, as a way of eking out a living. 63
Nothing is

known about his fragmentary history of the Germans (Nemce tarikhi), begin
ning with Charlemagne and breaking off after 1662. 64

Maritime handbooks and charts

Travellers acquired knowledge of the dar al harb in orbital movements, out
from the dar al islam and back again. 5 The Mediterranean in particular was a
zone where knowledge and technology circulated among mariners of differ
ent origins. The portolan chart, produced and used by Christians, Jews and
Muslims, is a good example. The Turkish admiral PTri Re] is (d. 963/1554L)
composed a Bahriyye, which he first submitted to the Sublime Porte in 1521,
then in an expanded version in 1526. In addition to a set of maps, the Bahriyye
includes descriptions of the entire shoreline, mostly for the use of sailors

62 Ma'juncuzade Mustafa Efendi, Malta Esirleri, ed. Cemil Ciftci (Istanbul, 1996).

63 'Osman Agha [Temeshvarli], Die Autobiographic des Dolmetschers 'Osman Agha aus
Temeschwar: Der Text des Londoner Autographen in normalisierter Reehtschreibung herausge
geben, ed. R. Kreutel (Cambridge, 1980), ed. and trans. R. F. Kreutel and O. Spies as Der
Gefangene der Giauren: die abenteuerlichen Schicksale des Dolmetschers 'Osman Aga aus
Temeschwar, von ihm selbst erzahlt (Graz, 1962); R. F. Kreutel (trans.), Zwischen Paschas
und Generalen: Bericht des 'Osman Aga aus Temeschwar uber die Hohepunkte seines Wirkens
ah Diwansdolmetscher und Diplomat (Graz, Vienna and Cologne, 1966).

64 Kreutel and Spies (ed. and trans.), Der Gefangene der Giauren, p. 13, refers to an
unspecified manuscript in Istanbul.

65 John Wansbrough, Lingua franca in the Mediterranean (Richmond, 1996).

66 Tony Campbell, 'Portolan charts from the late thirteenth century to 1500', in Harley and
Woodward (eds.), Tfte history of cartography, vol. I (Chicago, 1987); Svatopluk Soucek,
'Islamic charting in the Mediterranean', in Harley and Woodward (eds.), Tfte history of
cartography, vol. II/i.

Muslim accounts of the dar al harb

seeking information about shoals, reefs, harbours and access to fresh water.
Some passages recall the author's exploits, 67 while others describe towns such
as Venice or Naples, including legendary details. While the first version
claims to offer strategic information for future naval actions, the second is
more literary, and includes a long introduction in verse on the seven seas and
legendary cosmography. 9 Both versions treat Muslim and non Muslim terri
tories in the same fashion, showing no concern 'with boundaries other than
those between navigable and unnavigable space'. 70 PM Re] is also produced
two maps of America, in 1513 and 1528, for which he obtained information
from Spanish sailors. 71

In the Indian Ocean, pilots relied on celestial navigation rather than maps.
Nautical manuals provided descriptions of routes and instructions about
meteorological and astronomical phenomena, as well as some magical prac
tices. Information about the shores and their population was mainly restricted
to sailing instructions, with some references to local marvels. 72

Synthetic descriptions of the world

Many accounts of the dar al harb that once circulated as independent works are
known today through literary compilations that appeared from the fifth/elev
enth century onwards. Fragments of Ibrahim ibn Ya'qub al Turtushfs account
of his sojourn in central and eastern Europe around 965 are preserved in the
Kitab al masalik wa'l mamalik (Book of routes and realms) of Abu 'Ubayd al Bakri
(d. 487/1094). The work's title connects it to the genre of administrative

67 Svatopluk Soucek, 'Tunisia in the Kitab 1 bahriyye by Pin Re'is', Archivum Ottomanicum, 5
(1973).

68 Elisabetta Serrao, 'La descrizione di Napoli nel Kitab 1 bahriye di PTri Re'is', in U. Marazzi
(ed.), Turcica et islamica: Studi in memoria di Aldo GaUotta (Naples, 2003).

69 Svatopluk Soucek, Piri Reis and Turkish mapmaking after Columbus: The Khalili portolan
atlas (London, 1996).

70 Palmira Brummett, 'Imagining the early modern Ottoman space, from world history to
Piri Re'is', in D. Goffman and V. Aksan (eds.), The early modern Ottomans: Remapping the
empire (Cambridge, MA, 2007).

71 Giancarlo Casale, '"His Majesty's servant Lutfi": The career of a previously unknown
sixteenth century Ottoman envoy to Sumatra', Turcica, 37 (2005).

72 For Ahmad ibn Majid's Kitab alfawa'idfi usul al bahr see Gerald Tibbetts, Arab navigation
in the Indian Ocean before the coming of the Portuguese: Being a translation of Kitab al fawa'id
fi usul al bahr wa'l qawa'id of Ahmad b. Majid al Najdi; together with an introduction on the
history of Arab navigation, notes on the navigational techniques and on the topography of the
Indian Ocean and a glossary of navigational terms (London, 1972); for Seydi 'All Re'is see
M. Bittner and W. Tomaschek (ed. and trans.), Die topographischen Kapitel des indischen

Seespiegles Mohit (Vienna, 1897) and Jean Louis Bacque Grammont
(trans.), Le miroir des
pays (Paris, 1999).

geography (going back to Ibn Khurradadhbih, see above), as does the
literary
character of its historical and ethnographic digressions. 73 Works by the
fourth/
tenth century alWarraq (on Africa) and aljayhani (on eastern Europe and
Central Asia) have not survived, but al Bakri quotes them extensively. Al
Jayham is also quoted by many other geographers. 74

Al Bakri also wrote a dictionary of toponyms, as did Yaqut al Hamawi
(d. 62.6/122.9), whose Mu'jam al buldan (Dictionary of the countries)
brings
historical, ethnographic and philological information into alphabetically
arranged articles. Yaqut's sources include the travelogues of Ibn Fadlan
(see
above) and a certain Tamrm ibn Bahr al Muttawwi c i, who visited China.
75
Yaqut's own experience as a traveller plays a much smaller role. In
another
geographical work, al Mushtarik wad'an wal muftarik suq'an, Yaqut
collects
homonymous toponyms designating different places, a distinctly
philological
interest. A latecomer in this genre is Amin Ahmad Razi's dictionary of
poets
and places, Haft iqlim. 76 The pattern of rewriting earlier works in a
more
literary fashion appears in Ibn Sa'id al Maghribi (610 85/1213 86), a
prolific
anthologist. His aljughrafiya follows al Idrisi in its structure and much of
its
content, especially regarding Europe and non Muslim Africa. 77

Another type of encyclopaedia brought together accounts of 'the marvels
of
creation', with the goal of recognising the omnipotence of the Creator.
Situated at the margins of the world, these marvels did not have to meet
strict

standards of veracity, nor did they need to pertain to the present. Accordingly,
literary sources were just as welcome as travelogues: al QazwTni's (d. 682/
1283) double barrelled cosmographical encyclopaedia 'Aja'ib al makhluqat and
Athar al bilad drew material from Yaqut and similar sources. Works of this
kind shaped a 'popular' world view until the eve of modernity. 78 Attempts at

73 Krachkovskii, Arabskaya geograficheskaya literatura, pp. 275 9; E. Levi Provencal, 'Abu
'Ubayd al Bakrf, Eh, vol. I, pp. 155 7.

74 Hansgerd Gockenjan and Istvan Zimonyi, Orientalische Berichte iiber die Volker Osteuropas
und Zentralasiens im Mittelalter: Die Gayhani Tradition (Wiesbaden, 2003).

75 Possibly dating to the second /eighth century: see Krachkovskii, Arabskaya geografiche
skaya literatura, p. 137.

76 Ahmad Razi, Haft iqlim, ed. Jawad Fadil, 3 vols, (n.p., n.d. [Tehran, 1961]); E. Berthels,
'Razi, Amin Ahmad', Eh, vol. VIII, p. 478.

77 Al Idrisi has been identified as one of Ibn Sa'id's sources: see Manfred Kropp, 'Kitab
gugrafiya des Ibn Fatima: Eine unbekannte Quelle des Ibn Sa'id oder "Neues" von al
Idrisi?', in Un ricordo ehe non si spegne: Scritti di doeenti e coUaboratori dell'Istituto
Universitario Orientale di Napoli in memoria di Alessandro Bausani (Naples, 1996).

78 Karin Riihrdanz, 'Illustrated Persian 'Ajd'ib al makhluqat manuscripts and their function
in early modern times', in A. J. Newman (ed.), Society and culture in the early modern
Middle East: Studies on Iran in the Safavid period (Leiden, 2003).

Muslim accounts of the dar al barb

modernising the genre, such as the cosmography by Mehmed 'Ashiq (d. after
1005/1596), aimed more at the familiar world. 79

The vast encyclopaedias compiled by state functionaries of the Mamluk
sultanate combined humanistic erudition (adab) with practical knowledge.
Diplomatic relations required precise information about titles and ranks.
An example is the description of the Ilkhanid empire in Ibn Fadl Allah
al 'Umarf s Masalik al absar ft mamalik al amsar. While al 'Umari relied on
literary sources, he also interviewed envoys and merchants who had experi
ence of the Mongols.

Integration of non-Muslim sources

For reasons we have already mentioned, non Muslim sources regarding the
dar al barb were mostly avoided or ignored during the classical and post
classical periods. The discipline of Islamic history tended to limit itself to the
core Islamic lands, at least for the period beginning with the rise of Islam.
This remained true even for such broad ranging historians as Ibn Khaldun
(d. 808/1406).

However, there were exceptions. One of these was al Mas'udi (see above),
an outstanding product of the intellectual milieu of fourth/ tenth century
Baghdad. I For his world geography cum history, Muriij al dhahab, al
Mas'udI included a list of Frankish kings taken from a book by a Frankish
bishop. 2 Another exception was Rashid al Din (d. 718/1318), a Jewish convert
to Islam, who became one of the most influential politicians of the Ilkhanid
empire under Ghazan Khan. Rashid al Din composed a world history, Jami' al

tawarikh, and sought to disseminate it widely in both Persian and Arabic. In
order to situate the history of the Mongols and Ilkhanids within a universal
framework he included an appendix on the Arabs, Franks, Israelites, Mongols
and Chinese. For this purpose he engaged informants from the respective
cultures. The chronicle of Martin of Troppau has been identified as his
source for Frankish history, while his informant for China was a Mongol
named Bolad, a former high functionary at the Yuan court. This collaboration

79 Mehmed 'Ashiq made additions to the work from his own travels in the Ottoman lands,
but not from beyond: Gottfried Hagen, Ein osmanischer Geograph bei der Arbeit:
Entstehung und Gedankenwelt von Katib Celebis gihanmima (Berlin, 2003), pp. in 18.

80 Klaus Lech, Das mongolische Weltreich: al 'Umafi's Darstdlung der mongotischen Keiche in
seinem Werk Masalik al absar fi mamalik al amsar (Wiesbaden, 1968).

81 Bernd Radtke, Weltgeschiehte und Weltbesehreibung im mittelalterliehen Islam (Stuttgart,
1992), pp. 169 83.

82 Lewis, The Muslim discovery of Europe, p. 183.

491

The New Cambridge History of Islam

mirrors the position of the Ilkhanid empire as a conduit of cultural practices
from east to west. 83

Al Mas'udi and Rashid al Din remained unusual in their use of non Muslim
sources. The Ottomans were not averse to using such sources, as we have

seen in PM Re'is. However, as Ottoman horizons continued to broaden from
the later tenth/sixteenth century onwards, 84 authors looked to older Islamic
classics for information on the dar al harb. Mustafa 'All (d. 1008/1600) looked to
al Mas'udi for Frankish history and to 'All Akbar for China. 5 Munejjimbashi
(d. 1113/1702) used al Mas'udi' s account of the Trojan War, Katib Celebi
(reluctantly) used 'All Akbar and Ghiyath al Din Naqqash for China, while
Seyfi Celebi's rather obscure history of India and China draws on (yet
unidentified) Islamic sources. 87

Meanwhile, with Venice furnishing maps to the Ottoman court, 88
European maps, atlases, historical and scientific works continued to trickle
in. In an anonymous History of the West Indies (c. 1580) translations from
Spanish and Italian historians about the Americas are integrated into a frame
work reminiscent of Islamic cosmography and 'aja'ib literature; illustrated
copies also support the attribution of the work to this genre. 89 The Ottoman
polymath Katib Celebi undertook a project on world geography, but did not
feel satisfied with his work until he obtained European atlases by Mercator,
Ortelius and others, to fill in the gaps in his Islamic sources. Basing his
description of East and South East Asia on these new sources, Katib Celebi
switched back to Islamic sources for Central Asia, India and Iran, even as his
method became increasingly informed by Mercator. 90

This trend towards domination by Western sources and models continued,
with the translation and abridgements of Willem Blaeu's Atlas maior by Ebu

83 Thomas Allsen, Culture and conquest in Mongol Eurasia (Cambridge, 2004), esp. pp. 63
102.

84 Jean Louis Bacque Grammont, 'Remarques sur les chemins de la decouverte du monde
par les Ottomans', in J. L. Bacque Grammont et al. (eds.), D'un orient a Vautre: Aetes des

troisiemes journees de VOrient, Bordeaux, 2 4 octobre 2002 (Paris and Louvain, 2005), p. 163.

85 Jan Schmidt, Pure water for thirsty Muslims: A study of Mustafa 'Alt of Gallipoli's Kunhii
1 ahbar (Leiden, 1991), p. 30.

86 Jean Louis Bacque Grammont, 'Remarques'.

87 Josef Matuz, L'ouvrage de Seyfi Celebi, historien ottoman du XVIe siecle: Edition critique,
traduction et commentaires (Paris, 1968).

88 Benjamin Arbel, 'Maps of the world for Ottoman princes? Further evidence and
questions concerning "The mappamondo of Hajji Ahmed'", Imago Mundi, 54 (2004).

89 Thomas Goodrich, The Ottoman Turks and the New World: A study of Tarih i Hind i garbi
and sixteenth century Ottoman Americana (Wiesbaden, 1990).

90 Hagen, Ein osmanischer Geograph. The draft translation of Mercator's Atlas minor,
originally made as a basis for Katib Celebi's Jihanniima, also circulated separately.
Yirmisekiz Gelebi Mehmed consulted it in preparation for his trip to Vienna.

492

Muslim accounts of the dar al harb

Bekr el Dimeshqi (d. 1102/1691), and the dissemination of Katib Celebf s works
in the official printing press directed by Ibrahim Miiteferriqa (d. 1158/1745). 91
The latter also wrote treatises on European affairs, to provide Ottoman decision makers with information on their adversaries. 92. The Hungarian

born Miiteferriqa's role is characteristic of the way in which learned individ
uals, both native Ottomans and converts, gained state patronage as cultural
mediators and marshalled arguments in favour of political and military
reforms. 93 Subsequently, this practice of translating geographical and political
works blended with the accounts of embassies, when a former ambassador to
Vienna and Berlin, Ahmed Resmi, compiled a Jughrafya yi jedld. 94 The
twelfth/eighteenth century saw the production of numerous other, smaller
treatises on Europe, while other parts of the world went virtually unnoticed.
By the end of this period the literarisation of geography, still palpable in the
History of the West Indies and the Ottoman reception of PM Rels, had been
reversed: knowledge about the dar al harb once again served clearly defined,
practical purposes. This explains why Western sources could now be blended
almost seamlessly with the Ottoman classics, although the share of the latter
actually decreased to virtually nothing by the time of xht Jedld atlas terciimesi, a
rendering of William Faden's General atlas printed together with a systematic
introduction in 1803. 95 However, while geographical knowledge met a stra
tegic need, this was not true for history, which still tended to be read moral
istically, as a provider of examples. The numerous Ottoman world historians
between Mustafa 'All and Munejjimbashi took no notice of the translation into
Turkish of a history of France, originally written in the sixteenth century. 96
Katib Celebi commissioned a translation of Johannes Carion's sixteenth
century Protestant chronicle, but it is not clear if he intended to use this

91 Orlin Sabev, Ibrahim Miiteferrika ya da ilk Osmanh matbaa seriiveni (1726 1746): Yeniden
degerlendirme, (Istanbul, 2006).

92 Victor Menage, 'Three Ottoman treatises on Europe', in C. E. Bosworth (ed.), Iran and

Islam: In memory of the late Vladimir Minorsky (Edinburgh, 1971).

93 'Osman ibn 'Abdulmennan (d. c. 1786), a translator in Belgrade, wrote a world geog
raphy based largely on Varenius' Geographia generalis: see Konstantinos Thanasakis,
'The Ottoman geographer Osman b. Abdulmennan and his vision of the world in
Tereiime i Kitab i cografya (ca. 1749 1750)', MA thesis, Bogazici University (2006). We
wish to thank Mr Thanasakis for making this work available to us.

94 Ekmeleddin ihsanoglu (ed.), Osmanh cografya literatiirii tarihi, 2 vols. (Istanbul, 2000);
Aksan, An Ottoman statesman, p. 38, refers to it as a translation of an unidentified text.

95 See Kemal Beydilli, Turk bilim ve matbaacihk tarihinde Miihendishdne, Miihendishdne
Matbaasi ve kiitiiphanesi (1776 1S26) (Istanbul, 1995), pp. 169 72.

96 Jean Louis Bacque Grammont (ed.), La premiere histoire de France en turc ottoman:
Chroniques des padichahs de France (Paris, 1997).

493

work to revise his own world history. 97 Other translations of historical texts
have been noted, but these also remained without further impact. 98

Conclusion

From the beginnings of Islam until the early modern period, Muslims who
crossed political and geographical boundaries into the dar al harb typically
crossed social and literary boundaries as well. And when these Muslims wrote

about what they had experienced, observed or imagined, their accounts could
not be measured against the standard of what was considered to be secure
knowledge, all the more so since these writers tended to lack scholarly
pedigrees. Not surprisingly, therefore, Muslim accounts of the dar al harb
usually ended up as fragments of knowledge situated at the margins of the
accepted canon, or outside it altogether. All this did not prevent the circulation
of practical information, but it was only in the early modern and colonial
period, with its tendency towards the unification of knowledge, that xeno
logy' drawing on both eyewitness reports and older, written sources found
expression in a full fledged, accepted set of literary genres. At that point, as
literary and journalistic writing proliferated, the concept of dar al harb became
more or less irrelevant, as cultural boundaries became blurred, and the
exoticism of the periphery vanished altogether.

97 Hagen, Ein osmanischer Geograph, p. 67.

98 For another example, see Aksan, An Ottoman statesman, p. 41, n. 20. On Temeshvarli
'Osman Agha, see above.

494

PART IV

LEARNING, ARTS AND CULTURE

The English term 'knowledge', Franz Rosenthal reminds us, does not fully
convey the 'factual and emotional' weight of the Arabic Him. Him, he contin
ues, 'is one of those concepts that have dominated Islam and given Muslim
civilization its distinctive shape and complexion'. 1 The central role of knowl
edge, of course, flows from the importance of making Islamic civilisation's
greatest treasures, the Qur'an and the hadith (the reported sayings and doings
of the Prophet Muhammad), live and work in each day, each year and each
generation of Muslim life. There is no part of Muslim life, Rosenthal contin
ues, 'that remained untouched by the all pervasive attitude toward "knowl
edge" as something of supreme value for the Muslim being. Him is Islam even
if the theologians have been hesitant to accept the technical correctness of this
equation.' 2 Without knowledge there could be no salvation.

It was for this reason that the famous treatise on teaching and learning by
the seventh/thirteenth century scholar al Zarnuji made the pursuit of learning
a requirement for all Muslims, male and female. 3 They were to seek knowl
edge, moreover, as the oft repeated tradition stated, 'even if it be in China'. 4
This was, furthermore, an activity that should consume them from the cradle
to the grave, so al Zarnuji (d. 602/1223) tells the story of Muhammad ibn al
Hasan (d. 179/795), who appeared to a believer in a dream to say that he had

been so absorbed in thinking about the manumission of slaves that he had not
noticed his own death. 5 Such was the emphasis on learning that traditions

1 Franz Rosenthal, Knowledge triumphant: The concept ofknowledge in medieval Islam (Leiden,
1970) p. 2.

2 Ibid.

3 Burhan al Din al Zarnuji, Ta'lim al muta'allim tariq at ta'allum. Instruction of the student:
The method of learning, trans. G. E. Von Grunebaum and Theodora M. Abel (New York,
1947), P- 21.

4 Jonathan Berkey, The transmission ofknowledge in medieval Cairo: A social history of Islamic
education (Princeton, 1992), p. 1, n. 1.

5 Zarnuji, Ta'lim, p. 57.

exalting the superiority of learning over prayer, or the ink of the scholar over
the blood of the martyr, were frequently quoted. Such was the impact of learning, as well as the esteem in which it was held, that the thirteenth century
Baghdadi scholar [Abd al Latif (d. 629/1231) in his advice to students declared:

Know that learning leaves a trail and a scent proclaiming its possessor: a ray of
light and brightness shining on him, pointing him out, like the musk merchant

whose location cannot be hidden, nor his wares unknown.

This said, it was understood that a Muslim's learning should be in accordance
with his status in the world. Every believer should know the requirements of
the five pillars of Islam. Beyond this believers should know enough to conduct
their occupations and professions lawfully in the sight of God. 7 Nevertheless,
there was a predilection to place high value on achievement in learning, and
unsurprisingly the learned gave it the highest value. Man, declared Ibn
Khaldun (d. 808/1406), 'reaches perfection of his form through knowledge'.

By the same token Muslim societies accorded scholars great honour. They
were, after all, the guardians in their time, and the transmitters to future
generations, of the central messages that helped to mould Muslim societies.
They were often referred to as the 'heirs to the Prophets'. 'Kings are the rulers
of people', went one oft quoted tradition, 'but scholars are the rulers of
kings'. 9 In their role as teachers and there were few scholars who did not
teach students were to esteem and venerate them as they were their own
fathers:

In venerating the teacher [among other things it is necessary to avoid] walking
in front of him or sitting in his place. Also one should not begin speaking in his
presence without his permission, and then one should not speak to any great
extent before him. One should not ask him any [question] when he is weary.
One should observe the correct time ... In short one should seek his approval,
avoid his resentment, and obey his commands in those things which are not
sinful in the eyes of God. 10

This respect for the teacher as the transmitter of the central messages of Islam
was typical of Muslim societies down to the twentieth century.

6 George Makdisi, The rise of colleges: Institutions of learning in Islam
and the West

(Edinburgh, 1981), p. 91.

7 Zarnuji, Ta'lim, p. 21.

8 Ibn Khaldun, The Muqaddimah: An introduction to history, trans. Franz Rosenthal,
2nd edn, 4 vols. (London, 1967), vol. II, p. 425.

9 Berkey, Transmission of knowledge, p. 4.
10 Zarnuji, Ta'lim, p. 33.

498

Education

With this respect went an expectation of the highest standards of behaviour.
In his Thy a? al Ghazali (d. 505/1111) sets out the 'signs of the learned man of the
hereafter': he focuses on the next world rather than this; he practises what he
preaches; he fosters piety; he avoids luxury in food and dress; he shuns the
powerful; he is deliberate and careful in giving his opinion; he is sincere, humble, avoids innovation and so on. 11 But scholars, being no more than
human, found it difficult to sustain these high ideals. There was a constant
stream of criticism of those who fell short of the ideal. Al Ghazali himself was
deeply critical of the scholars of his day who, out of self interest, placed their
weight behind government decrees, or who, as 'prattling wearers of flowing
robes', became obsessed by the minutiae of law at the cost of the true meaning
of the Qur'an. 12 Indeed, al Ghazali's life itself, as depicted in his autobiogra
phy, al Munqidh min al dalal (The deliverance from error), formed a journey in
which he came to realise the worthlessness of worldly advancement as

compared with growth in spiritual understanding. 13 Shaykh Sa'di Shirazi's (d.
691/1292) Gulistan, which was used in schools wherever Persian was spoken
from Istanbul to Bengal, and from Central Asia to East Africa, reveals a sharp
nose for the hypocrisy of the learned, whether it was the teacher who did not
practise what he taught or the notorious qadi (judge of Islamic law) of
Hamadhan, who was found, stupefied with drink, in bed with a boy. 14 Such
was the sartorial splendour of the c ulama' (religious scholars) in Mamluk
Egypt, in particular their wearing of outsize turbans, that the streetplayers
of Cairo would perform a satire called 'The manner of the judge' in which the
scholarly interpreters of the sharfa (Islamic law) were lampooned, parading in
outsize turbans, sleeves and long scarves. 15

The fields of knowledge

Throughout the middle period of Islamic history knowledge tended to be
divided into two broad fields: the 'ulum naqliyya, the transmitted or traditional
sciences, all of which owed their existence to God's revelation to man through
Muhammad; and the 'ulum 'aqliyya, the rational sciences, all of which were

n Abu Hamid Muhammad al Ghazali, Imam Gazzali's Ihya ulum id din, trans, al Haj
Maulana Fazul ul Karim (Lahore, n.d.), book I, pp. 73 109.

12 Ebrahim Moosa, Ghazali and the poetics of imagination (Karachi, 2005), pp. 8 10.

13 William Montgomery Watt (trans.), The faith and practice of al Ghazali (Oxford, 1994).

14 Shaykh Mushrifuddin Sa'di of Shiraz, The Gulistan of Sa'di, trans. W. M. Thackston
(Bethesda, 2008), pp. 68, 119 23.

15 Berkey, Transmission of knowledge, pp. 182 3.

499

The New Cambridge History of Islam

derived from man's capacity to think and in which he was guided by his
human perceptions. These might equally be referred to as Greek, foreign
or
ancient sciences. This was how Khwarizml (fi. 364 77/975 87) divided
knowl
edge in the fourth/tenth century. 1 It is how Ibn Khaldun described it in
the
eighth/fourteenth century. 17 It was, moreover, the classic division of
knowl
edge in the academic curricula developed under the Ottomans, Safavids
and
Mughals. 1 In these curricula the subjects associated with adab, the
literary
arts, were more often than not made supportive of the traditional
sciences. 19
Nevertheless, in the fourth/tenth century Ibn al Nadlm (d. 385/995) and
in the
fifth/ eleventh Ibn Butlan (d. 485/1066) identified the literary arts as a
separate
field; and so, for expository purposes, shall we. 20

In his Muqaddima Ibn Khaldun lists the subjects that make up his two
main
fields of knowledge. In the traditional sciences the first, of course, was
the
Qur'an; the seven established ways of reading it; and the forms of Qur'an
commentary (tafsir). The second related to the hadith, the systems for
estab
lishing 'sound' transmission and the great collections of traditions, of
which
al Bukhari's Sahih held the highest rank. This was followed by
jurisprudence
(fiqh), the classification of the laws of God, as derived from the Qur'an
and the
traditions, including especial attention to the laws of inheritance. There
followed the principles of jurisprudence (usul alfiqh), the disciplines by

which jurists and scholars reached decisions on matters of law plus the
forms of disputation that lay at the core of legal studies. Speculative
theology
(kalatri) was also included, in spite of the dangers to orthodoxy it might
represent, because the skills the discipline developed were crucial to
defend
ing articles of faith and to refuting the claims of innovators. 21 The final
major
subject in this field was Sufism (tasawwuf), the approach of which 'is
based
upon constant application to divine worship, complete devotion to God,
aversion to the false splendor of the world, abstinence from the pleasure,
property, and position to which the great mass aspires, and retirement
from
the world into solitude for divine worship'. 22. This had been the very
particular
experience of al Ghazali. It was also the personal achievement of al
Ghazali to

16 George Makdisi, The rise of humanism in classical Islam and the
Christian West with special
reference to scholasticism (Edinburgh, 1990), p. 88.

17 Ibn Khaldun, The Muqaddimah, vol. II, pp. 436 9.

18 Francis Robinson, The 'ulama ofFarangi Mahall and Islamic culture in
South Asia (Delhi,
2001), pp. 221 51.

19 Ibid.; Makdisi, The rise of colleges, p. 76.

20 Makdisi, The rise of humanism, p. 88.

21 Ibn Khaldun, The Muqaddimah, vol. II, pp. 436 63, vol. Ill, pp. 1 75.

22 Ibid., vol. Ill, p. 76.

bring orthodoxy and Sufism into close enough contact for the two sides to respect each other's positions, for the most part, in word and deed. This said,
by Ibn Khaldun's time the emergence of the wujudl doctrines of Ibn al 'ArabI
and the increasing manifestation of ecstatic practices was causing discomfort
among jurists and muftis (experts in Islamic law who deliver legal opinions
(fatawa)). 2 ' 3 It was a discomfort felt throughout the middle period of Islamic
history, and much more so in recent times.

The rational sciences, according to Ibn Khaldun, were four in number. They were derived from the Greek works, the translation of which into Arabic began during the caliphate of Harun al Rashld (r. 170 93/786 809) and continued to the end of the tenth century, and the impact of which produced a major intellectual awakening. The first was logic (mantiq), which
protected 'the mind from error in the process of evolving unknown facts'. 24
Aristotle was the man who had systematised the subject and made it the first philosophical discipline. It was for this reason that he was called 'the First Teacher', and his book on logic 'The Text'. 25 Major commentaries and
abridgements were written by al Farabi (d. 339/950), Ibn Sina (d. 428/1037)
and Ibn Rushd (d. 595/1196). The second area was physics (al tabiHyyat), the
elements perceived by the senses, minerals, plants and animals, plus the movements of the heavens. Two subsets of this subject were medicine, where Galen was the leading Greek authority and Ibn Khaldun acknowl edged a host of Muslim physicians of 'surpassing skill'; and agriculture, which involved the cultivation and growth of plants through irrigation, proper treatment, improvement of the soil and so on. 2 Metaphysics (Him al ilahiyyat), was the third major division, with all the dangers of uncon trolled philosophical speculation that went with it. Ibn Khaldun was clear about where its boundaries should be drawn: 'When the Lawgiver (Muhammad) guides us towards some perception, we must prefer that (perception) to our own perception.' 27 The fourth area was the mathemat
ical sciences (ta'aEm), which included geometry, arithmetic, astronomy and
music the theory of tones and their definition by numbers. A series of further subdivisions were recognised for instance, the craft of calculation,

algebra, business arithmetic, the arithmetic of inheritance laws, spherical

23 Ibid., pp. 99 103.

24 Ibid., p. in.

25 Ibid., p. 139.
26 Ibid., pp. 147 52.

figures, conic sections, and mechanics, surveying, optics and astronomical
tables. 2

Scholars in the middle Islamic period differed over precisely what subjects
constituted what has been termed adab humanism. 29 We shall follow the
analysis of the leading scholar of the subject. Grammar was the most important
part of adab studies. It was central to everything a scholar did in Arabic, from
poetry through to the writing of formal documents and the making of
speeches. But it was more than this; it was essential to maintaining the purity
of the language of the Qur'an, and of understanding it and interpreting it. 3 ° Of
course, there were many maxims. 'Grammatical speech is the beauty of the
lowly', went one, 'and solecism the blemish on the great'. 31 Poetry, with prose
in close attendance, was the 'premier art of adab, as grammar is its premier
instrument'. 32 It was the field of adab, moreover, in which literary production

was more prolific than in almost all others combined. In a society in which
command of language, and its public use, was particularly highly valued the
capacity to fashion beautiful words was a central means of praise and persua
sion no less than the command of a large stock of verse, and the capacity to
deploy it in conversation to telling effect was the mark of a cultivated man.
'Poetry', declared Abu '1 'Abbas al Nashi' (d. 293/906), 'is the bond of words,
the rich ransom of humanism, the retaining wall of eloquence, the locus of
skill, the range of the soul, the illustration of rhetoric'. 33 Eloquence, Makdisi
tells us, was the most essential part of Arab humanism, 'the kernel and apex' of
adab studies. The spur, of course, was the Qur'an, which Muslims knew they
could not emulate but which, nevertheless, made eloquence highly prized
throughout the Muslim world. 'Learn how to speak eloquently', the caliph
al Ma'mun's prime minister told his son, 'for it is through speech that man is
superior to all other animals; and the more skilful you are in speaking, the more
worthy you are of humanity.' 34 There was, moreover, the sense that eloquence
was less about decorative language than about the effective match of language
and meaning. 'Eloquence', declared a tenth century poet, 'consists in words

28 Ibid., pp. 121 37. We should note that Ibn Khaldun acknowledges other areas of
knowledge: sorcery and the use of amulets, the evil eye, forms of letter magic and
alchemy. He is profoundly aware both of their existence and of the damage that, along
with metaphysics, they can do to religion. Ibid., pp. 156 246.

29 Makdisi, The rise ofhumanism, pp. 88 96.

30 Ibid., p. 129.

31 Ibid., p. 128.

32 Ibid., p. 131.

33 Ibid., pp. 137 8.

34 Ibid., p. 143.

502

Education

reaching their meaning before travelling too long.' 35 Allied to eloquence was
oratory, which might embrace all subjects and all occasions in Muslim public
life, but which was always classically deployed in the khutba, or sermon, in
Friday congregational prayers. 'A good part of the affairs of religion , declared
the eleventh century scholar Abu Hilal al 'Askari (d. after 400/1009), 'fall to the
lot of oratory: for oratory is that part of ritual prayer which is the pillar of
religion and feast days, Fridays, and gatherings of the Faithful/ 36

Yet another form of adab in which eloquence had its place was the art of
letter writing. This was an essential tool of government and diplomacy no less
than the means by which personal relationships were sustained across dis
tances. Manuals of good practice were produced, and the many collections of
model letters have been an important source for historians down to the
present. History as akhbar history, literary history, as opposed to ta'rikh,
chronologically dated history, was a further dimension of adab, which reaches
towards the historical novel and forms of biography. 37 Finally, there was the
moral philosophy of adab which was 'an eclectic combination of foreign and
Islamic traditions'. These might embrace Persian moral thought and Greek

philosophical ethics as well as the Qur'an and the surma (the example of the
Prophet Muhammad). 38 Moral philosophy became a particular feature of wa c z,
the academic sermon, which might be given by an independent scholar in a
range of contexts from mosque or madrasa through to his own home. In the
eleventh and twelfth centuries wa'z became an important vehicle for the
assertion of traditionalist understandings against those of the
rationalists. 39

The relationship between the traditional sciences and the other two is
worthy of comment. That with the rational sciences was never particularly
smooth. Some scholars were always suspicious of an intellectual tradition
whose sources lay outside Islamic history which was not unreasonable,
as few could forget the attempt of the rationalists in the third /ninth
century to impose their understanding of revelation on the traditionalists.
Endowments, moreover, establishing madrasas tended to exclude the teach
ing of rational subjects as inimical to Islam, although madrasa libraries might
still contain their books. 40 On occasion hostility might go much further, as

35 Ibid., p. 145.

36 Ibid., p. 152.

37 Ibid., pp. 163 7.

38 Ibid., pp. 171 2.

39 Ibid., pp. 173 200. For comment on the art of the academic sermon, and its attendant
dangers, see George Makdisi, Ibn 'Aqih Religion and culture in classical Islam (Edinburgh,
1997), PP- 220 8.

40 Makdisi, The rise of colleges, pp. 77 8.

for instance when the Ayyubid sultan al Malik al Karnil (r. 615 35/1218 38),
forbade the 'ulama' of Damascus from teaching or studying any subject but
the traditional sciences; students of the rational sciences were expelled. 41
This was an extreme action, but evidence of the tension between the fields
of knowledge frequently cropped up. It lay behind the great rivalry at
Timur's court in Samarqand between Sa'd al Din Taftazam (d. 792/1389),
who favoured the traditional sciences, and Sayyid Sharif aljurjam (d. 816/
1413), who favoured the rational sciences. 42 In Timur's time it is generally
thought that Jurjani had the upper hand, but the patronage of Timur's
successor, Shah Rukh, in establishing a madrasa at Herat a few years later
shifted the advantage back to Taftazanl's position. 43 This tension also lay
behind the debate at the end of the fifteenth century between Muhammad
al Maghili (d. 909/1503 or 910/1504) and al Suyuti over the study of logic. 44
This said, teachers might give courses in both fields, while student patterns
of learning would often include subjects from the two fields as well. 45 As
time went on the areas in which the rational sciences flourished most
vigorously were Timurid Central Asia, Shi c ite Iran and Mughal northern
India.

The relationship between the traditional sciences and adab studies was less
fraught. The centrality of knowledge of Arabic, and how to use it well, to the
traditional sciences sustained a strong link. 'Whoever seeks to learn hadith
without knowing grammar', went one tradition, 'is like a jackass whose
feedbag has no oats.' 46 A second strong link was that the Qur'an itself was
the foundation and inspiration of many adab disciplines. This is not to suggest,
however, that the relationship was completely harmonious. The masters of

hadith did not always value the presence of grammarians, while students of
hadith were not welcome among the humanists. 'Here come the bores', declared one poetry teacher as students of hadith joined his teaching circle. 47
Nevertheless, we can conclude with Makdisi that 'the ideal education was to

41 Jonathan Berkey, The formation of Islam: Religion and society in tfie Near East, 600 1800
(Cambridge, 2003), p. 230.

42 Maria Eva Subtelny and Anas B. Khalidov, 'The curriculum of Islamic higher learning in
Timurid Iran in the light of the Sunni revival under Shah Rukh', JAOS, 115, 2 (1995),
p. 214.

43 Ibid., pp. 210 36.

44 Elias N. Saad, The social history of Timbuktu: The role of Muslim scholars and notables 1400
1900 (Cambridge, 1983), p. 80.

45 Makdisi, The rise of colleges, pp. 78 9; Michael Chamberlain, Knowledge and social practice
in medieval Damascus, 1190 1350 (Cambridge, 1994), pp. 83 4.

46 Makdisi, The rise of humanism, p. 99.

47 Ibid., p. 105.

Education

master both worlds of learning, to be a scholar and a humanist, to combine the
critical scholarship of the c alim [religious scholar] and the urbane elegance and
refinement, zarf, of the humanist adib'. 4S

The transmission of knowledge

The transmission of knowledge was not, for the most part, a matter of formal
institutional arrangements: it was an informal and intensely personal process
between teacher and pupil. Thus when Muslims talked of the bringing of learning
to a particular region, or its revival, they talked of the impact of individual
scholars, as Ibn Khaldun did about the return of serious learning to north west
Africa in the thirteenth century, 49 and as the Kano Chronicle described the impact
of al Maghirl on the city at the end of the fifteenth century 50 and the Muslims of
Madras in 1941 described the impact of Bahr al c Ulum Farangi Mahalli (d. 1225/
1810) on southern India at the end of the eighteenth. 51 Because the personal
relationship was so important, it made the student's choice of teacher critical. He
was urged to take time over the business and consider very carefully the man's
learning, piety and age. 52. The personal element, moreover, was underlined by
the great biographical dictionaries which recorded with whom a student studied
and what he studied, but litde if anything about where he studied. The quality of
an education 'was judged', Berkey tells us, 'not on loci but on personae'. 53

The personal nature of the transmission of knowledge was emphasised by
the haJqa, or study circle, in which teaching took place, and the etiquette that
governed its proceedings. Such circles might operate in a variety of environ
ments, as the teacher found convenient: in a mosque, private house, shop or

madrasa; or perhaps under a tree or on a river bank. The teacher decided who
was to be admitted to the circle and when it met, as well as the sequence of
subjects and the methods of instruction. Teaching began and ended with
prayers. The teacher would sit on a cushion or a chair with his back to a wall or
a pillar, and his students would sit cross legged in a semi circle before him. As
the student succeeded in his studies he was invited to sit closer to the teacher,
thus biographies might state of an able student: the teacher 'brought the

48 Ibid., p. 112.

49 Ibn Khaldun, The Muqaddimah, vol. II, pp. 427 9.

50 H.J. Fisher, 'The eastern Maghrib and the central Sudan', in R. Oliver (ed.), The
Camhidge history of Africa, vol. Ill: From c. iojo to c. 1600 (Cambridge, 1977), p. 295.

51 S. S. Pirzada, Foundations of Pakistan: All India Muslim League documents 1906 1947, 2 vols.
(Karachi, 1970), vol. II, p. 351.

52 Berkey, Transmission of knowledge, pp. 22 3.

53 Ibid., p. 23.

student close to him'. 54 Biographical dictionaries used the term suhba, 'com
panionship' or 'discipleship', to describe the relationship between the teacher
and his closest students. Derived from the days of the Prophet and his
Companions, it implied, as Ephrat tells us, 'an extremely close personal and

intellectual relationship between teacher and student, one fostered over the
course of many years'. 55 The world of Him from the Maghrib to South East
Asia was held together by tens of thousands of such relationships.

The personal nature of the teacher student relationship was further expressed in the precise method of transmitting knowledge. Oral, person to person transmission was greatly preferred to private study. 'The Qur'an', declared Ibn Khaldun in discussing the art of teaching, 'has been the basis of instruction, the foundation of all habits that may be acquired later on.' 56 The Qur'an, the recitation, was realised and received as divine, by being read out aloud. It was always transmitted orally. It was thus that the Prophet had transmitted the message he received from God to his followers. And when, a few years after the Prophet's death, these messages came to be written down, it was as an aid to memory and oral transmission. Learning the Qur'an was the first task of young Muslim boys and girls, and in this context again it was orally transmitted. The usual method was that each day the teacher would dictate some verses, which the students would write on their slates, or have written for them. The student would then spend the rest of the day learning them. Those who were able to recite them successfully the next day, in addition to what had been recently transmitted, would have fresh verses dictated to them.

Oral transmission in the early Islamic centuries had a similar role to play in the publication of a book. Its writing down, like that of the Qur'an, was merely an aid to oral publication. The author would dictate his first draft either from memory or from his own notes; the copyist would then read it back to him. Publication would then take place through the copyist reading the text to the author in public, usually in a mosque. During the process the author might make additions and emendations, and several readings might be required

before it was given his authorisation. This was known as his ijaza, which

54 Daphna Ephrat, A learned society in a period of transition: The Sunni 'ulama' of eleventh
century Baghdad (Albany, 2000), pp. 76 9; Christopher Melchert, 'The etiquette of
learning in the early Islamic study circle', in Joseph E. Lowry, Devin J. Stewart and
Shawkat M. Toorawa (eds.), Law and education in medieval Islam: Studies in memory of
Professor George Makdisi, E.J. W. Gibb Memorial Trust (Chippenham, 2004), pp. 33 44.

55 Ephrat, Learned society, p. 81.

56 Ibn Khaldun, The Muqaddimah, vol. Ill, p. 300.

506

Education

meant 'to make lawful'. Thus the author gave permission for the work 'to be
transmitted from him'. Further copies had real authority only when they had
been read back to the author and approved. 57

A teacher would transmit one of the great texts of Islamic education in a
similar way. He would dictate the book to his students, who might write it
down, but almost certainly would commit it to memory in time such
pedagogical texts came to be written in rhyme to help the memory.
Subsequently there might be an explanation of the text, depending on its
nature. The completion of the study of the book would involve a recitation of
the text with an explanation. If this was done to the teacher's satisfaction, the
student would be given an ijaza, a licence to transmit that text, which has been

well described by Berkey as 'a personal authority' over the text. 58 On that ijaza
would be the names of all those who had transmitted the text, going back to
the original author. The pupil was left in no doubt that he was now the trustee
of knowledge transmitted from person to person from the past.

It might be asked why person to person transmission of knowledge, involv
ing recitation out aloud, should persist in a society where scholars were highly
proficient in reading and writing, paper was plentiful and book production a
major activity. The problem was that there was scepticism about the written
word, the understandable scepticism of an oral society, in which an individual
might be in the most literal sense bahr al L ulum, an ocean of knowledge.
'Language', declares Ibn Khaldun, 'is merely the interpretation of ideas that
are in the mind.' Oral expression was crucial to extracting the meaning from
language. The study of books and written materials placed a veil between
representation and meaning; it 'separates handwriting and the form of letters
found in writing from the spoken words found in the imagination'. 59 To
understand words properly the student had to read them out aloud. So as
the Qur'an gained full realisation only in being recited out aloud, so too did
the academic book only give of its full meaning to the student by being read,
or recited, aloud. Truth, it was felt, was more likely to be transmitted in
speech than in writing. The halqa could be a very noisy affair.

The emphasis on person to person transmission had at least two important
consequences for the Muslim world. One was that most scholars travelled
widely so that they could receive knowledge in person. The custom had
begun with the early collection of hadith. It was vigorously continued by

57 J. Pedersen, The Arabic book, ed. R. Hillenbrand, trans. G. French (Princeton, 1984),
pp. 20 36.

58 Berkey, Transmission of knowledge, p. 34.

59 Ibn Khaldun, Tfie Muqaddimah, vol. Ill, pp. 316 17.

The New Cambridge History of Islam

later scholars, spurred by a real desire for truth but not unaware of the
increase in authority that such journeys might bring. Of course, the search
for knowledge came in time to be combined with that for academic position.
So 'Abd al Latif moved from Baghdad to Mosul, from place to place in
Anatolia, to Cairo twice, to Damascus twice, to Jerusalem twice and to
Aleppo twice. The Spanish scholar mystic Ibn al c Arabi (d. 638/1240) travelled
from Murcia to Seville, Tunis, Fez, Cordoba, Almeria, to Tunis again, twice
each to Cairo, Jerusalem, Mecca and Baghdad, and to Mosul, Malatya, Sivas,
Konya and Damascus. So too, the remarkable writer of pedagogical texts,
Sayyid Sharif aljurjani, travelled from Taju by the Caspian, to Herat,
Karaman, Alexandria, Constantinople, Shiraz and to Samarqand, where he
was to become a great figure at Tirnur's court. When a scholar could not get
knowledge from an author in person, he strove to get it from a scholar whose
isnad, or chain of transmission from the original author, was thought to be the
most reliable.

The second consequence of person to person transmission, which flowed
from the first, was that the Muslim world came to be covered by networks of
teacher student connections. From the eleventh century Baghdad found itself
at the centre of such a network. ° From the fifteenth century Timbuktu in
West Africa was also such a centre. J Cairo was always a great centre, a role
exemplified in the fifteenth century by the endowment deeds of several of its
large madrasas which enabled students to visit their families all over the

world. 2 An ijaza given by the Egyptian polymath al Sakhawl (d. 902/1497)
to Ibn al Hishi (b. 848/1444) in Mecca is equally revealing of a truly cosmopol
itan world of scholarship. 63 It is thus that we can begin to see how Him, and its
person to person transmission across the Muslim world, was one of the key
links that held this world together.

The deeply personal nature of this person to person transmission is
brought home by the wording, and perhaps the underlying humour, of the
following ijaza bestowed by 'Izz al Din ibn Jama'a (d. 819/1416):

The student mentioned herein presented before me also in a good, precise,
orderly, masterful, and excellent manner, a presentation of one whose
memorization is perfect, whose pronunciation is adorned by excellent per
formance, and whose fortune has been bestowed abundantly by the spring of
divine concern. He raced through the text like a fleet courser in a lion infested

60 Ephrat, Learned society, pp. 33 74.

61 Saad, Timbuktu, pp. 58 93.

62 Berkey, Transmission of knowledge, p. 91.

63 A.J. Arberry, Sakhawiana (London, 1951).

508

Education

plain ... I hereby permit him to transmit from me the above mentioned book,
all that is permitted for me to transmit, and all that may be transmitted from
me, of my own writings and those of others, in poetry and prose, in the

transmitted, rational, and traditional sciences, according to the conditions
recognized by the specialists in transmission. 64

Among the aids to learning and this went for all fields of knowledge were
memory, disputation and note taking. Memory, as the support merely of the
transmission of knowledge, was the attribute of the ordinary scholar. Above
this level, for the humanist and scholastic, it was the support for creativity and
understanding, and finally at the forefront of knowledge it might be the basis
of ijtihad, producing one's own ideas. 65 The biographical dictionaries are full
of stories, doubtless some exaggerated, of prodigious feats of memory, of
whole libraries restored from memory after a fire. Moreover, men literally
dipped into the memories of great scholars. 'When we needed knowledge',
one wrote, 'we ladled from his ocean what was not to be had in books.' 67 The
transmission of knowledge was only really valued from those who produced it
from memory. In consequence, the educational guides spoke of those things
that helped memory: for instance, working early in the morning; avoiding
heavy foods, and places where one might be distracted, and those things that
hindered it, for instance, 'eating fresh coriander, acid apples and beholding a
man crucified'. 9 For all its centrality memorisation was not an end in itself.
Real learning also meant understanding, being able to use critically the
materials memorised and apply them to academic problems. 'Memorizing
two words is better than hearing two pages', went one aphorism, 'but under
standing two words is better than memorizing two pages.' 70

Forms of instructive conversation (mudhakara), and the notebook (daftaf)
were further aids to memory. At one level such conversations might involve
students drilling or quizzing each other after a lesson. At another level this
conversation might develop into a munazara, or formal disputation, over a
point of grammar perhaps, or drawing on verse to debate a particular theme.

At the apex of education, for a scholar about to emerge as a professor of law,
mastery of disputation was the final stage. Great debates had all the thrills, in

64 D. Stewart, 'The doctorate of Islamic law in Mamluk Egypt and Syria', in Lowry et ah
(eds.), Law and education, p. 74.

65 Makdisi, The rise ofhumanism, p. 202.

66 Makdisi, The rise of colleges, pp. 99 103.

67 Makdisi, The rise ofhumanism, p. 202.

68 Chamberlain, Knowledge and social practice, p. 145.

69 Zarnuji, Ta'lim, p. 69.

70 Berkey, Transmission of knowledge, p. 30.

performance and in recollection, of boxing matches/ 1 Taking notes was crucial to prompt the memory and help preserve undistorted what had been
transmitted. Scholars jealously guarded their notebooks; al Ghazali told a robber that he could take everything but his notebooks. 'My boon companion
is my cat', declared the adab scholar Ibn Faris (d. 395/1005), 'my notebook, the
intimate of my soul/ 72

The enormous emphasis on person to person transmission of knowledge should not lead us to think that self teaching did not take place. It tended not
to happen in the traditional sciences, where issues of authority were crucial
and where teachers and students were often supported by institutional

stipends and scholarships. But in the rational sciences and in adab studies
self teaching was not uncommon. This is evident from the numbers of books
written specifically for the autodidact for instance, Khwarizmi's Miftah al
c ulum (Keys to the sciences), which covered all the main fields of knowledge,
or Ibn Hindu's (d. 410/1019) Miftah altibb (The key to medicine). Some
scholars admitted to teaching themselves, so Ibn Sina (d. 428/1037) taught
himself medicine as a teenager and Fakhr al Din al Razi (d. 606/1209) taught
himself the rational sciences while holding a position in a college of law. This
said, the enduring preference was, whatever the subject, that the student
should learn from a teacher. 'I command you not to learn your sciences from
books unaided', c Abd al Latif of Baghdad advised his students, 'even though
you may trust your ability to understand.' 73

The ijaza the student received after successfully completing the learning of
a book at the feet of his teacher was a potent symbol of authority. As we have
noted, it gave the student authority over a text over part of the knowledge
that helped to shape Islamic civilisation. In a specific social environment it was
the symbol of the authority he derived from a close bond to a more senior
scholar. It also enabled him to access some of the authority of those men
tioned in the ijaza's isnad, back to the original author of the book. It was also a
form of authority that existed outside, and often opposed to, political power.
Arguably in its supreme form it was not a licence to transmit knowledge but
the ijazat al tadrls wa'l ifta\ the authorisation to teach law and issue legal
opinions, that Makdisi has argued was the origin of the European licentia
docendi. 74 The force of the ijaza, in whatever form, as a source of authority was
evident in medieval Muslim society. So the great Egyptian scholar Ibn Suyuti

71 Makdisi, The rise ofhumanism, pp. 208 9; Makdisi, The rise of colleges, pp. 128 40.

72 Makdisi, The rise ofhumanism, p. 214.

73 Ibid., pp. 212 27.

74 Makdisi, The rise of colleges, pp. 140 52, 272 6; Stewart, 'The doctorate' .

510

refused to transmit books in a sphere in which he was an acknowledged expert
because he had taught himself and therefore could not do so on the authority
of a teacher. 75 Scholars went to great lengths to compile collective biographies
indicating the authority that scholars in a family, a school of law or a place had
gathered through their ijazas. And so, too, in the ultimate accolade the
prestige of the practice was underlined in its abuse as ijazas came to be
given without learning the text, or to children who were too young to
understand what was going on, or they were just requested by letter. 76

Madrasas and education

The informality and non institutional nature of the transmission of knowledge
raises the issue of the purpose and function of the madrasa, the foundation
classically associated with Islamic secondary/higher education. The term itself
was derived from the second form of the verb darrasa, which, used without a
complement, means 'to teach law', giving rise to the term dars, a lecture on
law, and mudarris, a professor of law: a madrasa was a school or college in
which law was the main subject. 77 From the tenth century purpose built
madrasas began to be founded. In time they came to embrace a growing
range of provision: stipends for staff; scholarships for students; cells for

teachers and students; a residence, perhaps for the founder's family; a mosque;
and a mausoleum where the founder's family might be buried. These foun
dations began in Khurasan and from the eleventh century spread westward. In
1067 the Saljuq vizier Nizam al Mulk (d. 485/1092) founded his famed Nizamiyya madrasa in Baghdad, where al Ghazali was to hold a professorship.
Down to the end of the twelfth century this was followed by the foundation of
a further twenty three madrasas/ 8 By the 1090s the institution reached Damascus, where by 1261 there were fifty three madrasas, and Cairo by the
fifteenth century, where there were more than seventy three. The first madrasa was founded in Mecca in 1175, in Delhi in the early thirteenth century,
and in Tunis in 1252. 79 By this time, as Berkey suggests, the madrasa 'had
become perhaps the most characteristic institution of the medieval Near Eastern urban landscape'.

75 Berkey, Transmission of knowledge, p. 21.

76 Ibid., pp. 31 3; Ignaz Goldziher, 'Idjaza', Eh, vol. Ill, pp. 1020 2.

77 J. Pedersen and G. Makdisi, 'Madrasa', Eh, vol. V, pp. 1123 34.

78 Ephrat, Learned society, pp. 28 9.

79 Richard W. Bulliet, Islam: The view from tfie edge (New York, 1994), pp. 147 9.

80 Berkey, Formation of Islam, p. 137.

5ii

The New Cambridge History of Islam

The evolution of the madrasa did not stop at this point. Indeed, from the

thirteenth through to the fifteenth centuries madrasa foundations came to be
just part of what has been termed an 'educational charitable complex'. One
of the first of these was completed in 1267 68 by Muhammad Juwayni
(d. 681/1283), the vizier of the Ilkhan Hiilegii. Built in Yazd, it comprised a
mosque, a madrasa, a hospital, a pharmacy and a madhouse; it was estab
lished as one institution by its founding endowment. J This form, which
might also embrace a library, a Sufi convent, an orphanage, an observatory
and a hostel for travellers, spread across Iraq and Iran, reaching a peak in
Timurid Khurasan and Transoxania. Notable examples were that of Ulugh
Beg (r. 851 3/1447 9) in Samarqand, which it is said had 10,000 registered
students, 500 of them in mathematics, 2 and that of Sultan Husayn Bayqara's
(r. 873 911/1469 1506) vizier Mir c Ali Shir Nawa] i (d. 906/1500), the
Ikhlasiyya in Herat, which embraced a wide range of functions and, accord
ing to Khwandamir (d. 940/1534 or 943/1537), fed 1,000 people a day. 83 The
idea of the educational charitable complex also spread to Mamluk Syria and
Egypt. Ten years after the inauguration of Juwayni' s complex in Yazd, the
tomb of the Mamluk sultan Baybars al Malik al Zahir (r. 658 76/1260 77)
was transformed in this fashion. Over fifty years later this was followed by
the largest such development in Cairo, the mausoleum complex of Sultan
al Nasir al Hasan (r. 748 52/1347 51), which had provision for among other
things 120 Qur'an readers and 506 students. 84 Such was the fashion for
these complexes that earlier foundations began to transform themselves in
their image. 85

There was a view that the spread of madrasas was designed to fashion the
ideological forces that made the eleventh century 'Sunni revival' which ended
a period of Shi'ite dominance in Iran and Egypt. This view was substantially
undermined by George Makdisi, who argued instead that the spread of
madrasas was part of a process of institutionalising the teaching of law. He
saw madrasas 'as having an organized and differentiated student body, a

specialized curriculum, a professoriate certified to teach, and an institutional

81 Said Amir Arjomand, 'The law, agency, and policy in medieval Islamic society:
Development of the institutions of learning from the tenth to the fifteenth century',
Comparative Studies in Society and History, 41, 2 (1999), p. 272.

82 Ibid., p. 275.

83 Ibid., p. 276; Maria Eva Subtelny, 'A Timurid educational and charitable foundation:
The Ikhlasiyya complex of 'Ali Shir Naval in 15th century Herat and its endowment',
JAOS, in, 1 (1991).

84 Berkey, Transmission of knowledge, pp. 67 9.

85 Arjomand, 'The law', p. 275.

512

Education

educational goal the certification of teachers and jurists'. 86 More recent research based admittedly on one city, Damascus, but supported by research
elsewhere suggests that there is little support for this argument: students had
no collective sense of belonging to a group; they did not follow a particular
curriculum in law, but put together their own programmes of study; they did
not receive ijazas from their madrasas, but from their teachers; indeed, madrasas seemed to have had no formal corporate existence. 87

Madrasas were founded by sultans, administrators, soldiers, scholars and

judges; they were also founded by the wives of such men. The law of waqf,
which controlled the transfer of property for charitable purposes, enabled the
founder to make whatever provisions he or she wished providing they did not
contravene the tenets of Islam. Awareness of the social and political context in
which madrasas came to be founded, plus a study of waqfiyyas, or founding
documents, has enabled a more nuanced understanding of the reasons for
their spread to emerge. In the context of Mamluk Cairo, for instance, the
building by sultans of great fortress like madrasas was part of the politics of
display and commemoration. Such foundations were also a way for the elite,
who were not associated with learning, to annex the prestige of scholarship;
and if a mausoleum was part of the foundation there was the added bonus of
the material remains of the founder and his/her descendants being sur
rounded by the pursuit of knowledge, by worship. Such foundations also
enabled great families to provide posts for all kinds of retainers in their urban
milieu. We should not, however, discount genuine pious purposes which
were matters of no small concern, for instance, to Cairo's Mamluks. This
said, there was a powerful material incentive to found madrasas: the process of
endowment enabled the rich to hand on some of their wealth to their
descendants. Once the charitable purposes of a waqf had been met, it was
legitimate for the remaining resources to go to the descendants of the founder
in whatever way had been stipulated. 89 Equally it was possible for the con
trollership of the endowment to be held by a family member in one case in
Mamluk Cairo the controllership was worth more than three times the
professorship of law. 90 Education, moreover, was not necessarily a high
priority: in one madrasa foundation preachers, Qur] an readers, porters and

86 Chamberlain, Knowledge and social practice, p. 70.

87 Chamberlain, Knowledge and social -practice, pp. 69 90; Berkey, Transmission of knowledge,

pp. 15 20.

88 Berkey, Transmission of knowledge, pp. 128 60.

89 Ibid., pp. 134 6.

90 Ibid., pp. 136 7.

513

The New Cambridge History of Islam

cleaners had priority over teachers and students in payment; in another there
was no mention of teachers and students at all. 91

This does not mean that the spread of madrasas was insignificant in the
development of Muslim education. Whereas it did not lead to the formal
isation of educational processes which has been ascribed to it, it did enhance
the great informal work of transmitting knowledge. The madrasa was one
further forum in which person to person transmission of knowledge might
take place. Furthermore, the generous provision of stipends and scholarships,
for whatever purpose, greatly enhanced education, at the same time helping
to contribute to the professionalisation of the ^ulama' in general, and the study
of the traditional sciences in particular. Arguably these developments con
tributed to a homogenisation of religious life, 92 a shaping of Sunni identity 93
and what has been interpreted as a 'Sunni re centering'. 94

The spread of education beyond the central
Islamic lands

This pattern for transmitting knowledge with the emphasis on person to
person transmission and the involvement on occasion of madrasas, which

had developed in Iran, Iraq and Egypt, spread through the rest of the Muslim
world. One area of shared influences, though not exclusively so, was Mongol
and post Mongol Central Asia and Iran, plus the Ottoman and Mughal
empires. One feature was the flourishing of the rational sciences in, for
instance, circles around Nasir al Din Tusi (d. 672/1274) at Maragha, Sayyid
Sharif al Jurjanl in Samarqand, Ulugh Beg in Samarqand and Jalal al Din
Dawarii (d. 908/1502) in Shiraz. The rational sciences became more welcome
in madrasas, with a consequent impact on theology and religious thought in
general. Timurid patronage made Samarqand and Herat into great teaching
centres. It was in Samarqand that Sayyid Sharif al Jurjanl and Sa'd al Din
Taftazani wrote their many renowned commentaries, for instance, al
Jurjani's Mawaqif and Taftazani's Mukhtasar, which became the staple of
teaching from Istanbul to Calcutta down to the twentieth century. 95

The Ottoman empire was the only part of the Islamic world to develop a
rigidly hierarchical madrasa system. In the empire's early years scholars

91 Ibid., pp. 17 20.
92 Berkey, Formation of Islam, p. 189.

93 Ibid., p. 228.

94 Ibid., p. 189.

95 Robinson, Farangi Mahall, pp. 211 51.

514

Education

travelled to Cairo or Damascus to complete their education; they had, more
over, a particular admiration for the scholarly and literary achievements of

Timurid Samarqand and Herat. By the late sixteenth century the Ottomans
had established their full hierarchy of madrasas. At the bottom there were the
'exterior' madrasas which dealt with preparatory work in Arabic, the rational
sciences and adab studies. These had three grades according to the salary of the
teachers. Next there were the 'interior' madrasas which taught the traditional
sciences. These too were graded. At the top of the system were the semaniye
madrasas which Mehmed II (r. 848 50/1444 6 and 855 86/1451 81) and
Siileyman the Magnificent (r. 926 74/1520 66) established in their mosque
complexes. 96 Strict control was exercised over the progress of both students
and teachers through the hierarchy; students were not permitted to progress
from one grade to the next until they had satisfactorily completed all that was
required of the grade. Students and teachers progressed out of the madrasas
into jobs in the judiciary, bureaucracy and noble households. 97 This was an
imperial system in which the curriculum and appointments were controlled
by the sultan and which retained this form until the nineteenth century.
Nevertheless, the personal nature of the transmission of knowledge remained;
it was normally only by the grant of an ijaza from his teacher that a student
could progress from grade to grade. 98 As elsewhere, adab studies were also
pursued beyond the madrasa; in the case of one distinguished Ottoman
bureaucrat, in the tavern and the salon. 99 The rational sciences flourished in
the early Ottoman centuries, especially under Mehmed II, and this was
reflected in a good balance in the curriculum between them and the tradi
tional sciences. 100 But from the late sixteenth century they came under
increasing pressure, their fate being symbolised by the destruction of Taqi
al Din's (d. 993/1585) observatory in Galata in 1580. ml

The Mughal empire saw a rather different development in education.
There was, for instance, a complete absence of hierarchy or system.
Education was a matter for individual teachers; formal madrasas were a
rarity.

The rational sciences, moreover, came to play a larger role in scholarship than

96 Halil Inalcik, Tfie Ottoman empire: The classical age 1300 1600, trans. N. Itzkowitz and
C. Imber (London, 1973), pp. 165 71.

97 Colin Imber, The Ottoman empire, 1300 1650: The structure of power (Basingstoke, 2002),
pp. 228 31.

98 Cornell H. Fleischer, Bureaucrat and intellectual in the Ottoman empire: The historian
Mustafa Ali (1541 1600) (Princeton, 1986), pp. 27 9.

99 Ibid., pp. 22 4, 30 2.

100 Inalcik, Ottoman empire, pp. 175 8; Robinson, Farangi Mahall, pp. 240 3.

101 Inalcik, Ottoman empire, pp. 179 85.

515

The New Cambridge History of Islam

elsewhere in the Sunni world. Key to this was the translation of much of the
scholarship in the field from Central Asia and Iran into northern India. One
important moment was the arrival of Fadl Allah Shirazi (d. 997/1589) at the
court of the emperor Akbar (r. 963 1014/1556 1605). He introduced the works
in the field of Jalal al Din Dawani, Ghiyath al Din Mansur Shirazi (d. 949/1542)
and Mirzajan Shirazi, which led to the subsequent study of Mir Baqir Damad

(d. 1040 /1631 or 1041/ 1632) and his brilliant pupil Sadr al Din Shirazi (d. 1050/
1640). The next two centuries saw extraordinary developments in the field, in
particular among scholars from the qasbas of Awadh 102 The murder of one of
the key figures in the movement, Qutb al Din Sihali, in 1691 led to the
formalisation of these developments in teaching. The Mughal emperor,
Aurangzeb (r. 1068 1118/1658 1707), responded to the murder by granting
the sequestered property of a European merchant in Lucknow, Farangi
Mahall, to his four sons. One son, Mulla Nizam al Din (d. 1161/ 1748) formu
lated the Dars i Nizdmi, a course which in Farangi Mahalli hands made ample
room for the advances in the rational sciences in Central Asia, Iran and Awadh,
and which introduced a new style of teaching, focusing on the most difficult
books. The Farangi Mahallis and their pupils spread the Dars throughout India.
It was also adopted by the East India Company in its Calcutta madrasa. The
Dars was popular because it enabled students to finish their education more
quickly and because it prepared them well for bureaucratic posts. 103 From the
nineteenth century, with the rise of Islamic reform under the leadership of the
family of Shah Wall Allah (d. 1176/1762), the emphasis on the rational sciences
in Indian education declined. This said, we should note that the Dars i Nizami,
however interpreted, has been maintained in the madrasas of the subcontinent
down to the present. We should also note that from the Ottoman, through the
Safavid to the Mughal empire, there was a substantial overlap in the books and
commentaries taught. 104

The work of scholars and teachers was arguably more prominent in Africa
than elsewhere, but that may be because they were the prime creators of
sources. In West Africa great lineages transmitted knowledge: the Kunta in
Mauritania and Senegambia; the Jakhanke in Senegambia, the Aqit and And

Argh Muhammad in Timbuktu. 105 But we could talk equally of the Wangara

102 Robinson, Farangi Mahall, pp. 42 53.

103 Ibid., pp. 53 4.

104 Ibid., pp. 211 51.

105 Ira M. Lapidus, A history of Islamic societies, 2nd edn (Cambridge, 2002), pp. 409 10;
Lamin O. Sanneh, The Jakhanke: The history of an Islamic clerical people of the Senegambia
(London, 1979); Saad, Timbuktu, p. 82, 240 1.

516

communities of northern Ghana or the Nasiri Sufi brotherhood which spread
through the northern Sahara. 10 In Timbuktu the sixteenth century traveller
Leo Africanus (fl. 895 933/1490 1527) noted that books were the most valuable
items of trade. 107 The Shinqlt of Mauritania hunted books from Fez through to
the Hijaz, bringing caravan loads back to their lands. They were noted for
their learning in West Africa and generally for their high levels of literacy. 10
The library which Mahmud Ka] ti (d. 1001/ 1593) began in Timbuktu in the
sixteenth century, numbering nearly 3,000 volumes, has been described as 'the
find of the century in terms of African history'. 109 It goes without saying that
the African world of scholarship was international. To begin with, the scholars

of Timbuktu looked northwards to Morocco, where the Aqit Ahmad Baba
(d. 1036/ 1627) was to acquire such a reputation. But increasingly they came
to look eastwards to Egypt and the Hijaz. Al Suyufi was engaged with
Timbuktu for both political and scholarly reasons; his Jalalayn was widely
studied. The records of that remarkable eighteenth century Indian resident of
Cairo, Murtada al Zabidi (d. 1205/ 1790), reveal an astonishing network of
scholarly connections across Africa from west to east. 110

In this context Timbuktu emerged in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries as
a great 'university' city, assisted by its position at the crossroads of the north
south/ east west trade routes. It has been reckoned that there were up to 300
scholars in the city, who would have taught at the advanced level, plus 150
Qur] an schools for the elementary level. The 300,000 manuscripts or more
that exist in Timbuktu are a tribute to the scholarly effort of the era and its
influence. 111 Scholars usually taught in their homes and, because the size of the
body of scholars permitted specialisation, students would move from scholar
to scholar. At a more advanced level students received individual tuition; it
would appear that ijazas were only given in this case. 112 There was an

106 Ivor Wilks, 'The transmission of Islamic learning in the western Sudan', in Jack Goody
(ed.), Literacy in traditional societies (Cambridge, 1968); David Gutelius, 'Sufi networks
and the social contexts for scholarship in Morocco and the northern Sahara, 1660 1830',
in Scott Reese (ed.), The transmission of learning in Islamic Africa (Leiden, 2004).

107 Saad, Timbuktu, p. 79.

108 Ghislaine Lydon, 'Inkwells of the Sahara: Reflections on the production of Islamic
knowledge in Bilad Shinqit', in Reese (ed.), Transmission.

109 Albrecht Hofheinz, 'Goths in the lands of the blacks: A preliminary survey of the Ka'ti
Library in Timbuktu', in Reese (ed.), Transmission; see also John O. Hunwick and Alida
Jay Boye, The hidden treasures of Timbuktu (London, 2008).

no Stefan Reichmuth, 'Murtada al Zabidi (1732 1791) and the Africans: Islamic discourse

and scholarly networks in the late eighteenth century', Reese (ed.), Transmission.
in Hofheinz, 'Goths', p. 159.
112 Saad, Timbuktu, pp. 60 1.

emphasis on the traditional sciences, but the rational sciences were also taught, and there is no evidence of their being prohibited. 113 More generally,
'the curricula of study in Timbuktu', we are told, 'were designed to give the
scholars as wide a humanistic training as was the vogue in the Middle East at
the time'. Indeed, al Suyuti was regarded as a model. 114

Education was much less well developed in South East Asia. Islam had been
a much more recent arrival along the trade routes of the Indian Ocean. The
sultanate of Aceh in the seventeenth century was the first major centre of Islamic learning. Scholars came from India and the Islamic heartland. [Abd
al Ra'uf al Singkili (d. 1104/ 1693) was the dominant scholar of the period. In a
stay of nineteen years in Mecca, Jiddah, Bayt al Faqih, Zabid and Medina he
studied with fifteen teachers, among whom were Ahmad al Qushashi (d. 1070/

1660) and the great Ibrahim al KuranI (d. noi/1690). 115 'Abd al Ra'uf s writings
in particular, and the emphasis of Malay scholarship in general, suggest that
the prime concern was with the traditional sciences and with Sufism. If there
was any serious tension it was not with the rational sciences, but Sufism and
the appropriate interpretation of Ibn al c Arabi. This was a matter that Ibrahim
al KuranI resolved in a magisterial work. 11 Among the more popular works
studied were Baydawfs (d. 685/1286) Tamil and Khazin's (d. 740/1340) Ta'wil.
But by far the most popular work, as in many parts of the Muslim world,
was al Suyuti' s Jalalayn. 117 There is no evidence for the transmission of knowl
edge being institutionalised into pesantren, the Indonesian version of the
madrasa boarding school, until the late eighteenth century. There is a close
correspondence between the books taught in these pesantren and those at
Cairo's al Azhar and some Meccan halqas, which suggests Middle Eastern
influence over their development. 11

Spiritual education

Mystical education, the process of learning how to know God in one's heart,
which was called tasawwuf, the process of becoming a Sufi, was another
dimension of education. We treat these dimensions separately, but more

113 Ibid., pp. 74 81.

114 Ibid., pp. 78 9.

115 Peter Riddell, Islam and the Malay Indonesian world (London, 2001), pp. 125 6.

116 Ibid., pp. 125 38.

117 Ibid., pp. 141 7.

118 Martin van Bruinessen, 'Continuity and change in a tradition of religious learning', in

Wolfgang Marschall (ed.), Texts from the islands: Oral and written traditions of Indonesia
and the Malay world (Berne, 1994), pp. 132 7.

518

Education

often than not they were two sides of the same Islamic personality. It was widely accepted that the best scholars were those with spiritual understand
ing. Equally, it was widely understood that the starting point for the Sufi was
the faithful following of the injunctions of the shari'a as adumbrated by scholars. Sufis might discuss aspects of formal knowledge no less than 'ulama 1
might discuss tasawwuf.

To begin the process of spiritual education a man although it could also be a
woman would have to be accepted by a master (Ar. shaykh; Pers. plf). The
process of being accepted was not easy. The aspirant might have to undergo
humiliations to prepare for the hardships of the spiritual path cleaning latrines
was a favoured example. After three years of service, providing he had performed
satisfactorily and his shaykh had developed an affinity with him, he would be
permitted to enter his shaykh' s circle. The relationship would be formalised by an
initiation which would recall the oath of allegiance that Muhammad's followers
had sworn to him. Elements of the ceremony might vary from order to order,
but the clasping of hands and the giving of a patched cloak, or khirqa, as a symbol
of Sufi status, were common. The disciple would also receive a written shajara

(tree), which would show how spiritual knowledge had come from the Prophet,
through the founder of the order, down to his shaykh. One of his first tasks might
be to write down his spiritual lineage and commit it to memory. We might note
that whereas the pupil received his ijaza when he finished a book, the Sufi
received his shajara at the beginning of his spiritual journey. 119

If the teacher pupil relationship was special, the master disciple relation
ship was extra special. All knowledge, all understanding, all progress flowed
from the master. 'When the sincere disciple enters under obedience of the
master, keeping his company and teaching his manners', wrote Shihab al Din
Abu Hafs al Suhrawardi (d. 632/1234), 'a spiritual state flows from within the
master to within the disciple, like one lamp lighting another.' The disciple was
called a murld, one who desires, and the master, the murad, one who is
desired. 12,0 The master oversaw the spiritual journey of the disciple as a father
might a son. The reverence of a disciple for his master could go to extraordi
nary lengths. In fourteenth century India one Chishti Sufi rode the long
distance from Dawlatabad to Delhi facing backwards on his horse out of
respect for his master who remained in Dawlatabad. 12,1

119 Annemarie Schimmel, The mystical dimensions of Islam (Chapel Hill, 1975), pp. 101 3;
Carl Ernst, The Shambhala guide to Sufism (Boston, 1997), pp. 133 43.

120 Ernst, Sufism, p. 124.

121 Carl Ernst, Eternal garden: Mysticism, history, and politics at a South Asian Sufi center,
2nd edn (New Delhi, 2004), p. 124.

In his master's company the disciple would be taught the dhikr of his order,
its way of remembering God and other rituals. Under his master's guidance he
would follow the path or ladder to higher levels of mystical experience, a
process often described as 'unveiling'. He might start with tawba (repentance),
a turning away from sin and worldly concerns, and embrace the struggle
against nafs, the body's sensual appetites. He might move through the stage of
tawakkul (complete trust in God), to mahabba (love) and ma'rifa (gnosis),
achieving the state of fans' and baqa\ the total annihilation of the self in the
divine presence. 122 Once the disciple had achieved this level of understanding
his master might make him a khalifa, or successor, who was permitted to
guide others along the path. At this point his master might bestow upon him
another cloak, a cloak of succession. There were many disciples and few
successors.

The powerful bonds of disciple master allegiance were often closely inter
twined with those of pupil and teacher. Often it was the connections of Sufi
orders that played the central role in assisting the transmission of knowledge
other than tasawwuf as the Naqshbandi Sufis did in Asia, or the Qadiri Sufis in
Africa. 123 These two powerful educational bonds reinforced each other in
transmitting knowledge across the Muslim world.

The early education of children

Approaches to the early education of children were for the most part driven by
the need to save their souls. 'The child', declared al Ghazali, 'is by way of
being "on loan" in the care of his parents ... If he is made accustomed to good
and is so taught, he will grow up in goodness, he will win happiness in this
world and the next, and his parents and teachers will have a share of his

reward.' 124 Parents were responsible before God for the education of their
children; fathers were particularly responsible for protecting their sons from
evil influences in their environment. The onset of the 'age of discernment'
(tatnyiz), when the child knew the difference between right and wrong and
could begin to grasp abstract ideas, was the time for education to begin. This

122 Schimmel, Mystical dimensions, pp. 98 186.

123 Marc Gaborieau, Alexandre Popovic and Thierry Zarcone (eds.), Naqshbandis:
Cheminements et situation actuelle d'un ordre mystique musulman (Paris, 1990); Lapidus,
Islamic societies, p. 415; there is an excellent exposition of the intertwining of pupil
teacher and disciple master links in Barbara D. Metcalf, Islamic revival in British India:
Deoband, 1S60 1920 (Princeton, 1982), pp. 87 197.

124 Avner Gil'adi, Children of Islam: Concepts of childhood in medieval Muslim society
(Basingstoke, 1992), p. 50.

development was thought to take place usually between age six and seven.
Indeed, education at this age was a condition for success: 'At this age',
al Ghazali said, 'learning is like engraving a stone.' Character training was
part of the process; al Ghazali was concerned that the child 'get used to
modesty, respect for others, and gentleness of speech'. 12,5 But the desire to
play was not to be neglected, as it was seen as a means to attract the child

towards more serious studies. Apart from those involving chance, there was a
general approval of games. Indeed, tenth century Baghdad was known to have
a toyshop. 12

Over much of the Muslim world the curriculum of the elementary school
(known as kuttab or maktab) was limited to the minimum that al Ghazali
prescribed: the tenets of faith, learning the Qur'an, traditions about the
beginnings of Islam and its prominent figures. 127 Parents favoured the limi
tation, Ibn Khaldun tells us, because they wished to exploit fully the oppor
tunity of youth to instil the most essential knowledge. 12 There were,
however, some areas where there was support for a broader curriculum.
The Tunisians added some 'scientific problems', knowledge of different read
ings of the Qur'an and laid much emphasis on handwriting. The Spanish went
further, including poetry and composition, and making sure that children had
a good knowledge of Arabic. 129

An enduring feature of discussions of elementary education was the beating
of pupils. That excessive corporal punishment was a problem is clear from the
recollections of men from all parts of the Muslim world. 130 Moreover, one of
the jobs of the muhtasib, the market inspector, was to oversee elementary
schoolteachers to make sure that they were not harming their charges. 131 In
theory a teacher could only beat a pupil with the father's permission. 132
Al Ghazali took the line that moderate force might be used, but it should be
seen as part of a package of measures designed to improve the conduct and

125 Ibid., p. 58.

126 Ibid., pp. 58 60.

127 Ibid., pp. 54 5.

128 Ibn Khaldun, The Muqaddimah, vol. Ill, p. 305.

129 Ibid., pp. 301 4.

130 Fleischer, Bureaucrat and intellectual, p. 21; Lutfullah,
Autobiography of Lutfullah:
An Indian's perceptions of the West, introd. S. A. I. Tirmizi (New Delhi,
1985), pp. 14 21;
L. O. Sanneh, 'The Islamic education of an African child: Stresses and
tensions', in
Godfrey N. Brown and Mervyn Hiskett (eds.), Conflict and harmony in
education in
tropical Africa (London, 1975).

131 Gil'adi, Children of Islam, p. 63.

132 Sherman A. Jackson, 'Discipline and duty in a medieval Muslim
elementary school: Ibn
Hajar al Haytami's Taqrir al maqaV, in Lowry et al. (eds.), Law and
education, pp. 25 8.

521

performance of the pupil. 133 Ibn Khaldun was also opposed to the
severe
treatment of children, in part because it led them into deceitful ways; but
in
part, too, because it dehumanised them, with deleterious effects for
society. 134
This said, it was to be expected that pupils would get their revenge on
their
teachers. Arguably, the most hilarious episode in that classic of the story
teller's repertoire, The adventures ofAmirHamza, which spread
throughout the
Asian Muslim world, described the revenge of Hamza and his sidekick,
Amar,
on their brutal muUa (teacher). 135

The need to secure the child's salvation meant that kuttabs, often known
as
Qur'an schools, were to be found throughout the Islamic world, from the

great sabll kuttabs (fountain schools) of Mamluk Cairo through to say
Mauritania, where women would do the teaching in desert encampments.
Indeed, elementary education provided the basis on which not just higher
learning might flourish, but other activities, from trade to administration.
In
the sixteenth century Timbuktu supported between 150 and 180. In the
late
eighteenth Cairo had as many as 300. I3S There is an argument that
their
growth was, among other things, closely associated with that of trade.
137

Slave education

A good number of Muslim regimes were either dependent on slaves or,
indeed, ruled by them. Classic examples were the Safavid and Ottoman
empires and the Mamluk regimes of Egypt and northern India. This
meant
that the education and training of slaves was a matter of no small
importance.
In the case of the Egyptian Mamluks, they were usually imported as
youths
from the Eurasian steppe or the Caucasus. Converted to Islam, they
learned
Arabic and were trained for the most part as cavalry. Once their training
was
completed they were freed but had to serve either the Mamluk ruler or in
another Mamluk household. Because the system was replenished not by
birth
but by the importation of fresh batches of slaves, training in the Mamluk
way
had to be rigorous and intense. Mamluks followed the dictates of
furusiyya, a
code which valued courage and generosity as well as skills in
horsemanship,

133 Gil'adi, Children of Islam, pp. 163 5.

134 Ibn Khaldun, Tfie Muqaddimah, vol. Ill, pp. 305 7.

135 Ghalib Lakhnavi and Abdullah Bilgrami, The adventures of Amir
Hamza, introd. Hamid
Dabashi (New York, 2007), pp. 70 83.

136 Nelly Hanna, In praise of books: A cultural history of Cairo's middle class, sixteenth to the
eighteenth century (Syracuse, 2003), p. 51.

137 Ibid., pp. 57 64.

522

Education

archery and cavalry tactics. Mamluks lived together in garrisons. Skills were
maintained by regular competitions, at least twice a week. Their first loyalty
was to their Mamluk master or ustadh. 138

In the Safavid empire slaves from the Caucasus were crucial both to
asserting the power of central government and to success across a broad
front. They were educated in the royal household alongside princes and the
sons of noble families. They were taught both the traditional and rational
sciences, horsemanship, polo and archery, as well as civility, humanity and
painting. They progressed through the ranks by merit. 139

The greatest achievement in the education of slaves, however, was that of
the Palace School (Enderun), which was founded by Mehmed II soon after his
conquest of Constantinople, and which operated at the heart of the Ottoman
state for nearly 400 years. The school, in fact, was at the apex of a cluster of
schools in which slaves were trained. The dev§irme, or levy of Christian
subjects in lieu of taxes, was the main supplier of personnel in the sixteenth
century 10,000 12,000 slaves were supplied thus every three to four years. For
most of its existence the school had 800 900 pupils. On arrival slaves were

tested and divided into two classes: the comely and intelligent, who went into
the sultan's service; and the remainder, who went into the Janissaries, the
sultan's elite corps of household infantry. Of those in the sultan's service, the
very able became student pages, and the remainder gardeners, gatekeepers
etc. The student pages themselves were divided between the most able, who
went into the Palace School, and the less able, who went into the auxiliary
schools. The sultan normally took great interest in the school, watching
sports, listening to debates and presiding over the admission and graduation
of pupils. 140

The curriculum was not dissimilar from that of the other slave systems,
though perhaps rather more wide ranging. The traditional sciences were
studied, but of the rational sciences only arithmetic, at which the Turks
excelled, and perhaps geometry. Turkish and Persian language and literature
were also studied, along with Turkish history and music. A well stocked
library supported wider reading, while vocational subjects such as calligraphy
were also available. Within the broad curriculum it appears that pages were

138 Robert Irwin, The Middle East in the Middle Ages: The early Mamluk sultanate u}0 1382
(London, 1986), pp. 3 10; Berkey, Transmission of knowledge, pp. 9 11.

139 Sussan Babaie, Kathryn Babayan, Ina Baghdiantz McCabe and Massumeh Farhad
(eds.), Slaves of the shah: New elites of Safavid Iran (London, 2004), pp. 29 30, 129.

140 Barnette Miller, The Palace School of Muhammad the Conqueror (Cambridge, MA, 1941),
pp. 70 94-

permitted to specialise according to inclination, only the Qur] an and Turkish
and Arabic languages being compulsory. Exercise was taken very seriously,
embracing weightlifting, wrestling, archery, sword practice, dart throwing
and horsemanship; there were many competitions. Progress was only by
merit. Punishment for breaking rules or failing in performance was severe
but controlled; a pupil could not be beaten more than once a day. The aim was
to produce good Muslims who were warrior statesmen, cultivated and cour
teous. By the account of outsiders the Ottomans were most successful. 141

It should be noted how far this system and indeed the other slave
systems differed from the normal run of education in Muslim societies.
Indeed, it has been suggested that, for instance, in the division of intellectuals
and artisans, the training of the body and the freedom to specialise, it owed
something to the inspiration of Plato's Republic. 142 ' We should also note that,
while l ulama' and lay teachers taught the pages, they do not appear to have
been offered the notable respect gained elsewhere in Muslim societies. That
was reserved for the sultan, 143 as it was for the Safavid shah and the Mamluk
ustadh.

Popular education

The transmission of knowledge was not just the particular work oi^ulamcC and
their pupils, or that of specialist environments such as the Sufi khanqah or the
Palace School; it was an activity that could touch everyone in Muslim
societies. There was the view that the madrasa should be open to the whole

community. 'To lock the door of a madrasa', declared Ibn al Hajj (d. 737/1336),
'is to shut out the masses and prevent them from hearing the [recitation] of
knowledge ... and being blessed by it and its people [i.e. the ^ulama'].' 144 So
madrasas in late medieval Cairo arranged the recitation of the Qur'an so it
might be heard by passers by in the street. 145 They provided large numbers of
lower level posts muezzins, gatekeepers etc. for men in their localities who
would not only be exposed themselves to the daily transmission of knowledge
but might also attend some classes and become transmitters themselves. 146
Madrasas provided more direct educational services to the community: some

141 Ibid., pp. 94 125.

142 Ibid., p. 42.

143 Ibid., pp. 94 125.

144 Berkey, Transmission of knowledge, p. 202.

145 Ibid., pp. 192 3.

146 Ibid., pp. 193 200.

524

Education

had employees to teach the Qur] an or how to write; others, along with mosques or khanqahs, might support men who would recite from memory,

for popular consumption, basic books from the traditional sciences including
Qur] an commentaries and accounts of the early pious Muslims. 147 However,
the activity in which the general public were most involved was the trans
mission of hadith. They might be recited at moments of public anxiety or
celebration. Some institutions held public sessions, distinct from normal
classes, in the months of Rajab, Sha'ban and Ramadan. There was also the
practice of mass transmission when members of the public might receive
ijazas for hadith they had heard. Such large scale transmission of knowledge,
though not necessarily with ijazas, could be found in other urban environ
ments, for instance, in eighteenth and early nineteenth century Lucknow,
where the Shi'a held majlis (assemblies for the remembrance of the imams)
during Muharram and Sunni c ulama' gave mawlid (birthday celebrations
for the Prophet Muhammad) lectures on the first twelve days of RahP
al Awwal. 148 At such points all could benefit from the transmission of
knowledge.

One dimension of popular education was preaching and story telling. The
popular preacher (waHz), declared one experienced fourteenth century
teacher, 'had the responsibility of inspiring pious fear in his listeners and
telling the stories of the early heroes of the Islamic faith'. 149 The storyteller,
or qass, on the other hand, 'would sit or stand in the streets, reciting from
memory passages from the Qur] an, hadith and stories of the early Muslims and
encouraging his audience to pray, fast, and fulfil their other cultic and legal
obligation'. 150 These functionaries, whose roles clearly overlapped, could be
found in many Muslim societies. Some preachers might be superstars, such as
the visitor to eleventh century Baghdad who drew audiences approaching
30, ooo. I51 Of course, the content might change according to time and context.
From the thirteenth century it would appear that the themes embraced by
storytellers in West Asia came increasingly to be infused by Sufi thought: the
desirability of poverty and the renunciation of the world, suffering, death,
judgement and salvation. 152 Scholars tended to have reservations, but were

147 Ibid., pp. 205 10.

148 Abdul Halim Sharar, Lucknow: The last phase of an oriental culture, ed. and trans. E. S.
Harcourt and Fakhir Husain (London, 1975), pp. 215 17.

149 Jonathan P. Berkey, Popular preaching and religious authority in the medieval Islamic Near
East (Seatde, 2001), p. 13.

150 Ibid.

151 Ibid., p. 25.

152 Ibid., pp. 45 7.

525

The New Cambridge History of Islam

forced to acknowledge the value of the role they performed: 'The storytellers
and preachers were also given a place in this order (amf) so as to exhort (khitab)
the common people', declared the Hanbali jurist Ibn al Jawzi (d. 597/1201) in
the twelfth century; 'as a result the common people benefit from them in a
way they do not from a great scholar.' 153

That scholars had reservations about popular preachers and storytellers is
worthy of note. They raised the issue of legitimate knowledge that is, of
authority in at least two ways. First, storytellers and popular preachers
tended to transmit spurious hadith and use inappropriate emotionalism. But
they also had great popular support. So, when al Suyuti issued afatwa (legal
opinion) against a storyteller for transmitting spurious hadith, the man's
audience threatened to stone the scholar. 154 Second, they tended to transmit

hadith and other texts without having heard them from a scholar, and there
fore without the authority of an ijaza. For all the good that these functionaries
might do, they also threatened the very basis of authoritative knowledge. 155

Women and education

It has been noted that copyists added to the well known hadith 'the seeking of
knowledge is the duty of every Muslim' the words wa muslima to underline
the point that this duty applied to every woman as well as man. 156 Throughout
the Muslim world there were women who engaged with education as far as
legal and social restrictions and the latter could be very constraining would
permit. There certainly existed some prejudice against educating women. 'It is
said that a woman who learns [how to] write', went a Mamluk market inspector's manual, 'is like a snake given poison to drink'. This view tended
not to be shared by c ulama\ who often played a leading role in educating their
own daughters, nor is there much evidence that it was shared by ruling families. It was, after all, hard to gainsay the example of the women of the
Prophet's family and those of his immediate followers. 157

One female engagement with education was the patronage of learning. In Mamluk Cairo women endowed a range of institutions in which education might take place, as well as five madrasas, most founded by royal women.
A sixteenth century history of madrasas in Damascus suggests that the city was

153 Ibid., pp. 23 4.

154 Ibid., p. 25.

155 Ibid., pp. 70 87.

156 Berkey, Transmission ofknowledge, p. 161.

157 Ibid., pp. 161 2.

Education

host to even more women's foundations. 158 Six of the thirteen major buildings
endowed by women in Safavid Isfahan were madrasas. 159 In Mamluk Cairo the
right to supervise the administration of a madrasa could go to the female
descendants of a founder. But that was as far as their association might go. No
woman held a post as a teacher or a student. Their presence, moreover, within
the madrasa confines was deemed highly undesirable; they would put the
students off their studies. 1 °

Patronage of learning was a worthy act, but it was real learning for the
individual that counted. Such learning might range from some engagement
with the Qur'an, hadith and knowledge of basic religious obligations through
to serious engagement with major books of advanced learning. Relatives
played an important role in teaching women within the home. Thus
Zaynab al Tukhiyya (d. 894/1388), who in the fourteenth century was brought
up in a small town in the Egyptian Delta, memorised the Qur'an under her
father, learned how to write, and studied several basic works of Shafi'i
jurisprudence. After she married she continued her education, studying
hadith under her husband's guidance. 1 r Scholars encouraged their daughters
to hear the transmission of hadith and collect ijazas. 1 ^ Moreover, it was
understood that with her husband's permission a woman might attend the
halqa of a scholar, at which men would be present, in a private house or a
mosque. 163 Learned women could play an especially important role in ena
bling the learning of women. In Fatimid Cairo there were women who

devoted themselves to teaching divorced and widowed women and young
girls in their homes. There were, moreover, at least five Sufi khanqahs
where
women taught women. 164 Nothing, perhaps, is quite as remarkable as
the
system of education for rural women created by Nana Asma'u (d. 1281/
1865),
daughter of c Usman dan Fodio, the creator of Nigeria's Sokoto
caliphate. She
sent groups of mature and intelligent women into the villages with her
authority to bring girls under fourteen and women over forty four to her.
These women in groups led by the best choral singers would wend their
way

158 Ibid., pp. 162 4.

159 Stephen P. Blake, 'Contributors to the urban landscape: Women
builders in Safavid
Isfahan and Mughal Shahjahanabad', in Gavin R. G. Hambly (ed.), Women
in the
medieval Islamic world (New York, 1998).

160 Berkey, Transmission of knowledge, pp. 165 7.

161 Ibid., pp. 169 70.

162 Ibid., pp. 170 1.

163 Ibid., pp. 170 2; Suraiya Faroqhi, Suhjects of the sultan: Culture and
daily life in the Ottoman
empire (London, 2007), p. 115.

164 Berkey, Transmission of knowledge, pp. 173 5.

to Sokoto where during their stay with Asma'u they would be taught the

essentials of the faith and how to apply the law. Asma'u's pupils would then
return to their villages to teach others. 165

The range of roles women had in transmitting knowledge is worthy of
note. In the Timurid and Mughal royal families the early education of young
boys and girls was handed over to older women in the household. Senior
women of the Ottoman harem taught young women how to speak and read,
and the requirements of the law, in an institution that paralleled that of the
Palace School. Doubtless, the improvement in the Turkish of the personal
notes sent by Hiirrem, Siileyman the Magnificent' s favourite consort from
Poland, to the sultan is testament to their success. 1 In the Sahara all the
women in the family educated young boys and girls in the Arabic alphabet,
grammar, reading and basic Qur'anic knowledge. 167 In Safavid Iran, in the
cities where Shi'ism was particularly strong, women restricted their teaching
to girls. 1 In Fatimid Cairo, and also in contemporary Damascus, women
played a major and respected role in transmitting hadith. So highly regarded
were they in the role that leading scholars such as Ibn Hajar al 'Asqalani
(d. 852/1449) and Jalal al Din al Suyuti relied on their authority in transmitting
hadith. 169

A further outcome of women s engagement with education was seriously
learned women. The restrictions of the harem mean that we shall never know
their number as we do for men. Nevertheless, al Sakhawi's famed biographical
dictionary tells of at least 411 women with some education, mentioning in
particular the many learned women of Damascus's BulqTni family. 170 In the
sixteenth century, Fakhri of Herat produced a biographical dictionary entirely
devoted to the poetesses and learned women of Timurid and early Safavid
Iran. Focusing on women from noble and scholarly families, it points to active
women's engagement in intellectual life, which in the Timurid period was
sometimes in mixed company. One notable figure was Bija Munajjima,
an astrologer/ astronomer renowned for her command of advanced

165 Jean Boyd, The caliph's sister: Nana Asma'u 1793 1865, teacher, poet and Islamic leader
(London, 1989), pp. 42 53.

166 Leslie P. Peirce, The imperial harem: Women and sovereignty in the Ottoman empire (New
York, 1993), pp. 63 5, 139 41.

167 Lydon, 'Inkwells of the Sahara', p. 48.

168 Maria Szuppe, 'The "jewels of wonder": Learned ladies and princess politicians in the
provinces of early Safavid Iran', in Hambly (ed.), Women in the medieval Islamic world,
P- 330.

169 Berkey, Transmission of knowledge, pp. 175 81.

170 Ibid., pp. 167 71.

Education

mathematics. A mystic, too, she was also known for her rivalry with the Sufi
thinker and poet 'Abd al Rahman Jami (d. 898/ 1492). lyl The Mughal royal
household was remarkable for its literary and learned women, produced in
every generation from the emperor Babur's (r. 932 7/1526 30) daughter,
Gulbadan Begum (d. 1011/1603), to the emperor Aurangzeb's daughter Zeb
al Nisa' (d. 1114/ 1702). I72 Few, however, were likely to match the range of
Nana Asma'u, who wrote in Arabic, Fulfulde and Hausa on: health, women's
education, sharTa law as it applied to women, women and bori (spirit pos

session), women as sustainers, the family, history, eschatology, politics, theol
ogy and her father's caliphate. 173

Conclusion

It is worth stepping back to consider the impact on the development of
Muslim societies from about 1000 to about 1800 of the high value placed on
the pursuit of Hbn. Certainly it meant that by the end of the period, despite the
continuing emphasis on the oral transmission of knowledge, forms of literacy
were spreading. Admittedly, 'literacy' is a slippery concept. We take it to
embrace all forms from the skills of the great scholar to the techniques learned
by a boy in a kuttab which were later put to use in his business in the bazaar.
But the search for Hbn was just one of the driving forces behind literacy. It
intertwined with the growth of trade; there is a correlation between the
intensification of international trade from the sixteenth century and literacy
in the regions involved. It also intertwines with the expansion of bureaucratic
and legal cultures over the same period. Arguably it is also expressed in the
growing practice of letter writing among middling folk and the keeping of
diaries. 174

Focusing on Hbn as knowledge transmitted by Hilama' and Sufis, we must
acknowledge their role in deepening the Islamic presence in different environ
ments. They might do so in great urban centres ruled by Muslim potentates
such as Fatimid Cairo or Nawabi Lucknow. They might do so on the Islamic
frontier in South and South East Asia, where, working, perhaps, with the
expansion of arable cultivation or more frequently with the long distance

171 Szuppe, 'The "jewels of wonder"', pp. 325 48.

172 Ruby Lai, Domesticity and power in the early Mughal world (Cambridge, 2005); Annie
Krieger Krynicki, Captive princess: Zebunissa, daughter ofAurangzeb (Karachi, 2005).

173 Boyd, The caliph's sister, pp. 121 35.

174 Nelly Hanna, 'Literacy and the "great divide" in the Islamic world, 1300 1800', Journal
of Global History, 2, 2 (2007).

529

The New Cambridge History of Islam

trade, they brought the high Islamic tradition into new environments, linked
them into great centres of Islamic scholarship and stimulated them with their
continuing discourse on how best to be a Muslim. Nowhere, however, does
their role seem to have been more prominent than in Africa.

It has been argued that the Muslim world in this period represented the
world system that preceded the Wallerstinian one based on the emergence of
capitalism in Europe. If the long distance trade across land and sea was one
dimension of this world system, the second was the pursuit of Him. From
Africa to South East Asia Arabic was the language of Islamic scholarship;
Muslims learned the Qur'an, transmitted hadlth and absorbed the tenets of
their faith. Some of the same textbooks were used both in Timbuktu and in
Sumatra. c Ulama' and Sufis travelled freely across this world in search of Him.
The connections of teachers and pupils, masters and disciples, represented
powerful linkages; indeed, they were the veins and arteries along which the
life giving blood of Him flowed.

One important point flows from the oral transmission of authoritative
knowledge and the non institutional nature of the teacher pupil
relationship.

It gave the process of transmission a flexibility which enabled it to be
remarkably inclusive. Foreign elites such as Mamluks could be included,
so
could women, so could the urban masses. Storytellers could entertain
whom
ever came their way, and a princess could reach out to rural villagers. l
Rm was
not locked behind the doors of institutions. It was not the sole possession
of a
caste of scholars, even though there was always the danger that, in fear
of
inaccuracy and innovation, the Hdama' would rather that this was so.
175

Marshall Hodgson characterised the classic systems of Islamic learning
as
essentially conservationist. 176 We have noted its central concern to pass
down
the priceless heritage of Him, the Qur] an, hadlth and the skills to make
them
socially useful, which were adumbrated in the books of great scholars of
the
past, in pristine form, a task that seemed more difficult with each passing
generation. This did not mean that changing times were completely
ignored;
they were addressed in fresh commentaries on, and sometimes
introductions
to, the great books. More generally they might be addressed in
preaching. We
have noted, furthermore, the enduring suspicion of the rational sciences,
which meant that by the eighteenth century their study in any substantial
sense had come to be confined to Iran and northern India. On its own
terms

175 Berkey, Transmission of knowledge, pp. 216 18.

176 Marshall G. S. Hodgson, The venture of Islam: Conscience and
history in a world civilisation,
3 vols. (Chicago, 1974), vol. II, pp. 437 44.

Education

the system was remarkably successful in reproducing itself and in sustaining
Islamic societies. Again, on its own terms it was able to produce creative
responses to the challenges of Europe, as it did in nineteenth and twentieth
century South Asia. 177 Some have thought that, had the rational sciences been
allowed to flourish, education and learning might have been able to produce a
more creative response to Europe. But apart from the odd will o' the wisp,
such as the translation into Persian in the early nineteenth century of
Newton's Principia by a scholar in the Farangi Mahall tradition, the areas
where the rational sciences flourished seemed to offer little hope. Their study
was in its way as conservationist as that of the traditional sciences.

This said, we should note the system's capacity, when transmitting knowl
edge construed in its broadest sense, to produce levels of intellectual develop
ment and human understanding able to support great bureaucratic empires,
administer vast armies, design some of the world's most beautiful buildings,
create some of the world's most loved poetry, bring a highly respected law to
many human societies and, most important of all, provide large numbers of
human beings with the guidance in life that offered them hope of salvation in
the hereafter.

177 Francis Robinson, Islam, South Asia and the West (New Delhi, 2007), pp. 59

531

21

Philosophy

RICHARD C. TAYLOR

Although the original meaning of the Greek term philosophy' (falsafa in
Arabic) is 'love of wisdom', philosophy encompasses a wide variety of
methods
and subjects, including the structure of reality, the character of human
actions,
the nature of the divine and much more. Philosophical method certainly
includes human rational argumentative discourse and investigation (al
nazaf)
by the use of intellect (bi I ^aql) in the search for what is true or right in
the
realms of nature, metaphysics and ethics. If understood in this sense,
philoso
phy or something much like it, employing many of the methods found in
philosophy can be seen in Islam among the mutakallimun or practitioners
of
kalam (Islamic argumentative theology) well before the advent of the
falasifa,
or philosophers working in the framework of Platonic and Aristotelian
thought. The Arabic term kalam has many senses, including speech,
word,
account and more, depending on context, including Divine Speech. Some
later
well known philosophers of the classical rationalist period, such as al
Farabi,
Ibn Sina/Avicenna and Ibn Rushd/Averroes, commonly regarded kalam as
unscientific dialectical argumentation in defence of basic tenets of the
Islamic
faith. However, some of the proponents of Him al kalam, the science of
kalam,
regarded themselves as engaged in expounding issues which today would
commonly be considered within the purview of philosophy, even if 'the
primary
function of kalam its end and its activity is to rationalise the basic beliefs
of
the Muslims as they are given in the Koran and the Surma and are
present in the
way these are read and understood by orthodox believers'. 1 To this
extent it

seems appropriate to call kalam a distinctly philosophical theology. From the

advent in the Islamic milieu of falsafa as a widely recognised intellectual

R. M. Frank, 'The science ofkalnm', Arabic Sciences and Philosophy, 2 (1992) p. 22. Also see
Harry A. Wolfson, The philosophy of the kalam (Cambridge, MA, and London, 1976); and
the authoritative and comprehensive work of Josef van Ess, Theologie und Gesellschaft im 2.
und 3. Jahrhundert Hidschra: eine Geschichte des religiosen Denkens imfriihen Islam, 6 vols.
(Berlin and New York, 1991 7).

discipline in the third/ninth century, kalam and fabafa existed as parallel discourses on issues of physics, metaphysics and ethics. They involved distinct principles and analyses, with kalam having a place inside religious institutions such as schools and mosques, while fabafa was taught separately as a secular science espoused by Muslims, Christians, Jews and others outside the confines of their religious confessions. These disciplines certainly eyed each other with considerable suspicion, and at times with outright hostility. There were some instances of methodological conciliation and many others of conflict, as is clear in the philosophers and also in well known theologians such as al Ghazali, Fakhr al Din al Razi and al Iji. While the present chapter focuses for the most part on fabafa, some remarks on kalam are in order.

'Ilm al-kalam, or Islamic philosophical theology

The mutakallimun are generally divided into two camps, the Mu'tazilites
and the Ash'aris, although reasoned theological disputes antedate these
group
ings. The major centres of kalam were Basra and Baghdad, although it
was
practised widely with great diversity of doctrine and reasoning.
Mu'tazilism is
traced to Wasil ibn Ata' (d. i3i/748f), who in the matter of grave violation
of
religious law is said to have separated himself (ftazala) from the extreme
positions of the Kharijite charge oikufr (unbelief), entailing ostracism
from the
Muslim community, and the Murji'ite view of the offender as remaining a
believer within the community. The term may also denote a middle
position
in the dispute over 'Alts succession as leader of the Muslim community.
Mu'tazilites are often characterised as holding for rational criteria in
theolo
gical issues, as is evident in the five principles found in Abd al Jabbar (d.
c. 415/
1025): tawhld (divine unity and uniqueness); c adl (justice); al wa l A wa I
waHd
(promise and threat, reward and punishment in the afterlife); al manzila
bayna
al manzilatayn (the intermediate position mentioned); and al amr bi I
ma'ruf
wal nahy 'an al munkar (the commanding of good and prohibition of evil).
2
There is an insistence on the value and efficacy of human rationality
present in
all these issues. As Frank remarks, 'The earlier Mu'tazilite masters held
that
the mind's autonomous judgment, based on purely rational principles and
axioms, is the sole arbiter of what must be or what may be true in
theology

2 For a translation of the 'Book of the five principles' by 'Abd al Jabbar
and a discussion of
classical and modern Mu'tazilism see Richard C. Martin and Mark R.
Woodward, with
Dwi S. Atmaja, Defenders of reason in Islam: Mu'tazilism from medieval
school to modern
symbol (Oxford, 1997). Also see D. Gimaret, 'Mu'tazila', E72, vol. VII, pp.
782 93, available
at www.brillonline.nl/subscriber/entryTentry islam COM 0822'.

The New Cambridge History of Islam

and their theology is, in this and in other respects, rationalistic in the proper
sense of the term.' 3 This is particularly evident in regard to divine justice, which
Mu'tazilites famously held necessarily to entail a strong assertion of human free
will for the sake of moral responsibility and justly deserved divine reward and
punishment. There also followed from the negative theology of their concep
tion of tawMd that the Qur'an is created, not eternal, a doctrine that was a key
point of contention during the infamous mihna of third/ninth century Baghdad.
The basis for this teaching was their ontological atomism, which held that all
created things are composed of atoms and accidents, 4 while God alone is eternal
absolute unity without attributes distinct from his essence. 5

Sophisticated opposition to this rationalist approach and the limitation of divine
will and power it appears to entail was set forth vehemendy by Abu '1 Hasan
al Ash'ari, who was born in Basra in 260/873 and died in Baghdad in 324/935f First
a student of the Mu'tazilite Abu 'All al JubbaT in Basra, al Ash c ari held for a more
literal approach to the statements of the Qur] an following the views of the
Baghdad jurist Ibn Hanbal (d. 241/855) who was imprisoned during the mihna
for refusing to accept the created nature of the Qur'an. While Ibn Hanbal rejected
anthropomorphism, as did the Mu'tazilites, he famously refused to accept exten

sive allegorical interpretation of scripture, and instead asserted that divine attrib
utes and other assertions about God must be accepted in their transcendent
mystery hi]a kayf, that is, without asking precisely how they can characterise the
Divine in a way acceptable to human reasoning. Al Ash'ari followed Ibn Hanbal in
this and held the Qur'an to be the uncreated speech of God, by whose will and
action alone all things exist. His doctrine of occasionalism, which ascribes all
agency to God who acts without restriction on his will, even in the case of acts

3 R. M. Frank, 'Elements in the development of the teaching of Ash'ari', Le Museon, 104
(1991), p. 144; repr. in Dimitri Gutas (ed.), Richard M. Frank: Early Islamic theology: The
Mu'tazilites and al Ash'ari: Texts and studies on the development and history ofkalam, vol. II
(Aldershot, 2005).

4 For brief accounts see M. Rashed, 'Natural philosophy', in P. Adamson and R. C. Taylor
(eds.), Tfie Cambridge companion to Arabic philosophy (Cambridge, 2005); and Jon
McGinnis, 'Arabic and Islamic natural philosophy and natural science', in Edward
N. Zalta (ed.), The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, available at http://plato. Stanford,
edu/ entries /arabic islamic natural/, first published 19 December 2006. A more compre
hensive account is found in A. Dhanani, The physical theory ofkalam: Atoms, space, and void
in Basrian Mu'tazili cosmology (Leiden, 1994).

5 See Peter Adamson, 'al Kind! and the Mu'tazila: Divine attributes, creation and freedom',
Arabic Sciences and Philosophy, 13 (2003); and Catarina Bello, 'Mu'tazilites, al Ash'ari and
Maimonides on divine attributes', Veritas (Porto Alegre), 52 (2007).

6 'One must grant, in brief, that between the traditionalist fundamentalism of ibn Hanbal
[on the one hand] and the leading masters of the Mu'tazila on the other, there may be

some third and it is, in fact, this third "intermediate way" to which the Ash'arites lay
claim': Frank, 'Elements in the development of the teaching of Ash'ari', p. 144.

534

Philosophy

attributed to human beings, was developed in response to the perceived lirnita
tions of divine will and power set forth by the Mu'tazilites. Espousing a form of
theological voluntarism or divine command theory, 7 al Ash'ari held that 'God
determines our works and creates them as determined [and] belonging to us' for
'God creates it as the motion of another' such that 'our acquisition (kasha na) is a
creation by another' 9 (sc. God). That is, the actions of human beings are created in
human beings as acquisitions from God, in whom all power for all actions, events
and things solely resides. In this way divine justice is faithfully held and defended
by the notion that 'He creates injustice for another, not for Himself, and is not
thereby unjust Himself.' 10 These and related views provided foundations for the
development of a flourishing Ash'arite school in Islam in which followed a long
list of theologians, many knowledgeable and sophisticated in fabafa, such as Fakhr
al Din al Razi (d. 606/1209) and al Ijl (d. c. 756/1355).

Falsafa, or the foreign science of philosophy

Translations

Philosophy in the Islamic milieu followed upon the availability of texts of the
Aristotelian and Platonic traditions. An enormous number of translations came
from Greek or Greek via Syriac during the reign of the Abbasid dynasty at the
newly created city of Baghdad designed by order of the second caliph, al Mansur
(r. 136 58/754 75). His support of the intensive translation movement of more
than 200 years brought to Muslims, Christians, Jews and other thinkers in Islamic
lands the scientific and intellectual wealth of a Greek tradition stretching back to
Galen, Aristotle, Plato, the Pre Socratics and Homer. 11 While there is no easily
identifiable single motivating factor for this movement, it has been suggested that
a 'culture of translation' present in a 'Zoroastrian imperial ideology' was
inherited, adopted and furthered by al Mansur and his successors, who had strong
familial and cultural links to Persian influences. 12 Most well known are the two

7 On theological voluntarism see Mark Murphy, 'Theological voluntarism', in Edward
N. Zalta (ed.), The Stanford encyclopedia of 'philosophy , available at http:/ /plato. Stanford,
edu/ entries /voluntarism theological/, first published 8 January 2008.

8 al Ash'ari, Kitab al luma', in Richard J. McCarthy, SJ (ed. and trans.), The theology of
al Ash'ari (Beirut, 1953), Arabic, p. 35, English, p. 74 (translation modified).

9 Ibid., Arabic, p. 44, English, p. 62.
10 Ibid,. Arabic, p. 44, English, p. 64.

n See Dimitri Gutas, Greek thought, Arabic culture: The Graeco Arabic translation movement in
' and early 'Abbasid society (2nd 4th/8th lotk centuries) (New York and London,

12 Ibid., pp. 40 5.

distinct early translation movements at Baghdad in both of which Christians
played key roles: the movement associated with the circle of al Kind! (d. 252/
866) though some of these translations preceded al Kind! and the movement
initiated by the famous Hunayn ibn Ishaq al 'Ibadi, a Christian Arab. 13

Works concerning issues of metaphysics, Platonic and Aristotelian, are
strongly represented in the translations associated with al Kindt's circle.
These include Aristotle's Metaphysics by Ustath (Eustathios) and the
Meteorology, On the heavens, as well as works of zoology by Ibn Batriq, who is
mentioned in the Fihrist of Ibn al Nadim 14 as having been commissioned to
translate by al Mansur. A much modified version of the Parva naturalia bears
internal resemblance to these, as does a treatise on the De anima probably
by Ibn Batriq, who also translated the Timaeus of Plato, which in the
Neoplatonic tradition was read as an important work of metaphysics. One
of the most important and influential translations of this period consisted of
thoughtfully selected texts on Soul, Intellect, the One and more from Enneads
IV VI by Plotinus in three collections constituting the Plotiniana Arabica: the
Theology of Aristotle; a Treatise on divine science falsely attributed to al Farabi;
and a group of dicta attributed to the 'Greek Sage'. Other works of
Neoplatonism such as the Introduction to arithmetic by Nicomachus and prop
ositions from the Elements of theology by Proclus also display the common
characteristics of this group: foreign terms, transliterations, phraseology from
Greek Persian or Syriac, neologisms and abstract nouns such as mahiyya

(which became 'quiddity' in later medieval Latin translation) and more. 15 The
preface of the largest portion of Plotiniana Arabica, the Theology of
Aristotle, 1 mentions the Syrian Christian Ibn Na'ima al HimsT as translator
and describes this work as an exposition by Porphyry (the original editor of the
Greek Enneads) edited by al Kindl for Ahmad ibn al Mu'tasim, son of the caliph
alMu'tasim (r. 218 27/833 42). There the work is also characterised as 'the

13 On the importance of Christians in the development of intellectual culture in Islam with
particular reference to philosophy see Sidney H. Griffith, 'Christian philosophy in
Baghdad and beyond: A major partner in the development of classical Islamic intellec
tual culture', in The church in the shadow of the mosque: Christians and Muslims in the world
of Islam (Princeton and Oxford, 2008).

14 This catalogue contains a wealth of information on translations. See Ibn al Nadrm, Kitah
al fihrist, ed. G. Fliigel, 2 vols. (Leipzig, 1871 2); also in Kitah al fihrist, ed. Rida Tajaddud
(Tehran, 1971); trans. Bayard Dodge as The Fihrist ofal Nadim, 2 vols. (New York, 1970).

15 See Gerhard Endress, 'The circle of al Kindl: Early Arabic translations from the Greek
and the rise of Islamic philosophy', in Gerhard Endress and Remke Kruk (eds.), The
ancient tradition in Christian and Islamic Hellenism (Leiden, 1997), esp. pp. 58 62.

16 See Peter Adamson, The Arabic Plotinus: A philosophical study of the 'Theology of Aristotle'
(London, 2002).

536

totality of our philosophy' in accord with what has already been spelled out in
the Metaphysics. 17 More than a mere translation, this work contains significant
omissions, interpolations and also translations of an Aristotelian flavour that
produced a deliberately crafted hybrid metaphysics in which the Neoplatonic
One beyond being and naming is restyled in Aristotelian fashion as being and
actuality, albeit now understood in a thoroughly non Aristotelian way as pure
being and actuality without the delimitations of form. This philosophical
transformation gave rise to an early form of the distinction of essence and
existence in medieval philosophy and was reflected in chapter 8 of another
work of the circle of al Kindi, the Kitab al idahfi al khayr al mahd (Exposition on
the pure good) (which powerfully influenced metaphysical thought in the
Latin West under the title Liber de causis (Book of causes)). 1 In this work the
First Cause is said to be anniyya faqat ('only being', esse tantum), while all
created things are form and being. 19 This hybrid metaphysics also set forth an
influential account of divine analogical predication which negated any com
prehensive natural knowledge of God and set out a negative theology by
denying of God the names of created things. At the same time it permitted
affirmative predication of attributes with the proviso that they be understood
in a higher, more transcendent way in God, the cause of all things. The
Plotinian doctrine of soul as both universal and transcendent was also harmon
ised with the Aristotelian hylomorphic doctrine to some degree by the trans
lator/ adaptor in a way that preserved the transcendent origin and nature of
the individual rational soul while retaining the Aristotelian view of it as form,
actuality and perfection in relation to the body. 2,0 The Theology also contains

Plotinus' famous account of the soul's mystical ascent to the One, an ascent in
which the soul 'is able to recognize the glory, light and splendour of the intellect and
to recognize the power of that thing which is above the intellect, being the light
of lights, the beauty of all beauty and the splendour of all splendour'. 21 The

17 'Jumlata falsafati na': Plotinus apudArahes, ed. A. Badawi (Cairo, 1947), p. 6; English trans,
of most of the Phtiniana Arabica by G. Lewis in Plotini opera, vol. II: Enneades IV V, ed.
P. Henry and H. R. Schwyzer (Paris and Brussels, 1959).

18 See Cristina D'Ancona and Richard C. Taylor, 'Le Liher de causis', in Richard Goulet
et al, (eds.), Dictionnaire de philosopher antiques: Supplement (Paris, 2003).

19 See Richard C. Taylor, Aquinas, the Phtiniana Arabica, and the metaphysics of being
and actuality', journal of the History of Ideas, 59 (1998).

20 See the detailed account of this in Adamson, The Arabic Plotinus, pp. 49 68.

21 See Plotinus apud Arabes, p. 56; English trans., Plotini opera, p. 375 (translation slighdy
modified). In his translation Lewis uses italics to indicate corresponding Greek text and
normal script to indicate additions and interpolations not found in the original Greek.
On 'the splendour of all splendour' see C. Bucur and B. G. Bucur, '"The place of
splendor and light": Observations on the paraphrasing of Enn 4.8.1 in the Theology of
Aristotle', Le Museon, 119 (2006).

much read Plotiniana Arabica, and these views in particular, exercised a sig
nificant influence on later philosophical thinkers. 22,

A more sophisticated and enduring tradition of translation was initiated by
the Nestorian Christian Hunayn ibn Ishaq al 'Ibadi (d. 260/873), who was
expelled from medical studies by Yuhanna ibn Masawayh only to reappear a
few years later reciting Homer in Greek. 23 His deep interest in medicine
coincided with strong demand for translations of medical works. He is said to
have translated over 100 works by Galen as well as works by Hippocrates and
the pharmaceutical Material medica by Dioscorides. Although learned in Syriac,
Greek and Arabic, Hunayn himself often translated from Greek into Syriac,
with others of his group translating from Syriac into Arabic. Working with his
son, Ishaq, and many others, Hunayn followed a much more sophisticated
understanding and scientific methodology. Translations by this group are much
more precise, especially in contrast to the paraphrasing and modifying tenden
cies found in works studied in the circle of al Kind! They made a deliberate
effort to form a technical vocabulary for science and philosophy in Arabic, and
at the same time to capture the sense of the texts without a slavish literalness
following the original. Both a prime motivation for this and also its value to the
philosophical tradition in Arabic are aptly described by Dimitri Gutas:

The high level of translation technique and philological accuracy achieved by
Hunayn, his associates, and other translators early in the fourth/tenth century
was due to the incentive provided by the munificence of their sponsors, a
munificence which in turn was due to the prestige that Baghdadi society
attached to the translated works and the knowledge of their contents. Better
long term investment was perhaps never made, for the result was spectacular
for the Arabic language and Arabic letters. The translators developed an

Arabic vocabulary and style for scientific discourse that remained standard
well into the present century. 24

They also produced translations of a much wider variety, among them
summaries or complete translations of works such as the Timaeus, Sophist,
Politics and Laws by Plato and most of the Organon as well as the Rhetoric,
Physics, On generation and corruption, On the soul, Metaphysics, Nicomachean
ethics and Magna moralia of Aristotle. Hunayn himself is said to have provided

22 See Peter Adamson, 'The Theology of Aristotle', section 5, in Edward N. Zalta (ed.), The
Stanford encyclopedia of philosophy, available at //plato. stanford.edu/entries/theology
aristotle/, first published 5 June 2008.

23 See G. Strohmaier, 'Homer in Bagdad', Byzantinoslavica, 41 (1980); G. Strohmaier,
'Hunayn b. Ishak al 'Ibadi,' Eh, vol. Ill, 578 9, available at www.brillonline.nl/
subscriber/ entry ?entry islam COM 0300, Marquette University, 27 February 2009.

24 Gutas, Greek thought, Arabic culture, p. 141.

Philosophy

an explanatory account of the Republic of Plato. Ishaq translated the De anima
and the Paraphrase of it by Themistius and also worked with the Sabian Thabit
ibn Qurra from Harran, where Neopythagorean interest in astrology and
mathematics was strong. Thabit commented on Aristotle's Physics, and cor

rected Ishaq's version of the Elements of Euclid and the Almagest of
Ptolemy.

Many other translators were active in this period, among them: Qusta ibn
Luqa, a Christian and expert in medicine who translated works of Galen
and
Hippocrates as well as the Metaphysics of Theophrastus, the Mechanica
of
Hero, the Arithmetica of Diophantus, and a Placita philosophorum
{Opinions
of the philosophers) and also works of astronomy, and who was probably
involved in translations of Aristotle's Physics and works of Alexander of
Aphrodisias and John Philoponus; and Abu 'Uthman al Dimashqi, a
Muslim
who translated works of medicine and mathematics as well as Aristotle's
Topics, Porphyry's Isagoge and works by Alexander. Other translations of
texts of Alexander, Porphyry, Proclus, Themistius, Nemesius and others
were also made available in this period when works might be translated
twice or more. This tradition of translation continued at Baghdad well
into
the fourth/tenth century, when al Farabi set out the philosophical
foundations
for the classical rationalist tradition. New translations, revisions of
earlier
versions and commentaries and explications of Greek philosophy
abounded
in a continuation of cooperation of philosophers and translators to bring
this
secular learning to prominence alongside the ongoing development of
reli
gious thought in their diverse Abrahamic traditions. Abu Bishr Matta ibn
Yunus (d. 328/940) led a second wave of translations from Syriac,
rendering
Aristode's account of Divinity in book 12 of the Metaphysics together
with a
commentary by Alexander, in addition to translations of Aristotle's
Posterior
analytics, Meteorology, On sense, Poetics and On the heavens. He is also
credited
with being the teacher of the philosopher al Farabi. The Christian
logician
Yahya ibn Adi (d. 363/974), a student of al Farabi, engaged in
philosophical
and theological debates and also was involved in the translations of
Aristotle's
Categories, Topics, Sophistics, Physics, On the soul, Metaphysics and
Poetics, as well
as the Metaphysics of Theophrastus and commentaries on Aristotle from
the
Greek tradition. 25 As the era of translation was coming to an end, Ibn

25 Many of the commentaries made available were of works from the dominant
Neoplatonic tradition. For details see Cristina D'Ancona, 'Greek into Arabic:
Neoplatonism in translation', in Adamson and Taylor (eds.), Tfie Cambridge companion
to Arabic philosophy; Cristina DAncona, 'Greek sources in Arabic and Islamic philoso
phy', in Edward N. Zalta (ed.), Tfie Stanford encyclopedia of philosophy, available at http: / /
plato.stanford.edu/entries/arabic islamic greek/, first published 23 February 2009.

539

The New Cambridge History of Islam

al Khammar (d. 408/1017) and Ibn Zur'a (d. 399/1008) translated works of
Aristotle including On the generation of animals, History of animals and
Meteorology. However, scientific achievements advancing beyond translated
sources were well under way, as was the formation of new philosophical
syntheses which developed into philosophical approaches native to the Islamic
milieu. With the conclusion of the translation movement the cultural assim
ilation of Greek philosophical thought begun in earnest with al Kindi, furth
ered by al Farabi and the Baghdad Aristotelians, as well as the Humanists of
Abu Sulayman al Sijistanf s circle, came to fruition in the brilliant mind of
Avicenna, who crafted a genuinely new philosophical account that proved to
be profoundly influential among many later philosophers and mutakallimun.

al-Kindi (d. 252/

Known as 'the philosopher of the Arabs', al Kindi played the roles of philoso
pher, adaptor, text editor, organiser and leader for a group of translators and
thinkers versed in the philosophical works of Aristotle and at the same time
much attached to the philosophical teachings of the Neoplatonic tradition. With
the support of members of the caliphal family, al Kindi was the first major
philosopher of the Arabic tradition to promulgate the ideas of the Greek
tradition in a concerted effort to establish a firm place in the Islamic milieu for
the secular and foreign science of philosophy. For nearly thirty years of al Kindfs
adult life the mihna, or imposition of religious views by al Ma'mun and his
successors, was in effect, with its distinctive insistence upon the created nature
of the Qur] an, a doctrine characteristic of Mu'tazilite teachings whose position
on divine attributes may be consonant with that espoused by al Kindi on the
basis of philosophical argumentation from the Neoplatonic tradition. Author of
perhaps as many as 250 works, al Kind! wrote on cosmology, mathematics,
optics, music and medicine, as well as metaphysics, philosophical psychology
and ethics. All but a small selection of his works are lost, though what remains
extant provides valuable information on his philosophical thought.

Perhaps the most valuable of the surviving works of al Kind! is a portion of
his On first philosophy in which we find him both advocating insistently for
the study of Greek philosophy in his day as a sound and valuable approach to
the true understanding of the nature of Divinity religiously revealed in the Qur] an
and also demonstrating the powerful argumentation of the Neoplatonists in
behalf of divine unity (tawhid). In his thoughtfully structured argument in the
preface, he establishes that philosophy at its highest level is consonant with Islam

in that 'the noblest part of philosophy and the highest in rank is the
First Philosophy, i.e., knowledge of the First Truth Who is the cause of all

Philosophy

truth'. 26 Logic and Aristotle's account of the four causes material, efficient,
formal and final reveal the definitions essential to the attainment of knowledge
and truth under the methods of the ancient philosophers, to whom thanks are
owed. He then proceeds to attack as devoid of religion those theologians of his
day who, with their weak methods, little knowledge, poor interpretations and
undeserved positions of leadership, label as unbelief (kufr) the philosophical
understanding of the real natures of things (Him al ashy a! bi haqaHqi ha). Yet they
do not understand that what they condemn encompasses the knowledge of
divinity, unity and virtue brought by true messengers (al rusul al sadiqa) in
confirmation of the divinity of God with truth which even these who oppose
philosophy are required to acknowledge as necessary. He then closes the
preface with an appeal to God for support and defence in this work which
will argue for God's divinity, explain His unity, and defend God against
unbelievers with arguments (bi I hujaj) squelching their unbelief 27 In this way
al Kind! understands philosophy, as found in Aristotelian metaphysics, the
Neoplatonism of the Plotiniana Arabica and Arabic texts from the Elements of
theology of Proclus, to constitute a single philosophical investigation that has
divine unity (tawhid) as its object, just as Islamic theology has as its
object tawhid

and what it entails. That is, he determines that metaphysics has God as its object
and he asserts that this philosophical study of divinity with its method of definition and demonstration is an equal to the methods of Islamic revelation
and theology in the attainment of the knowledge of the divinity and unity of
God. While the determination of God as object of this science has important
ramifications for the study of metaphysics, the assertion of an equality of philosophy and religion marks the initiation of argumentation that would be
used to assert the primacy of philosophy over theology in the thought of a number of major philosophers in Islam. The terms in which al Kindi framed the
debate set the stage for the classical rationalist accounts of al Farabi, Avicenna
and Averroes which find the necessity of philosophical methods, particularly the
ideals of demonstration, to yield a certain primacy for philosophy in the interpretation of revelation.

In what remains of the incomplete version of On first philosophy extant today, al Kindi argues for the physical and temporal finitude of body and,

26 al Kindi, Oeuvres pMhsophiques et scientifiques d'al Kindi, ed. Roshdi Roshed and Jean
Jolivet, 2 vols. (Leiden, 1997 8), vol. II, p. 9. English translation in al Kindi, alKindi's
metaphysics: A translation ofYa'qub ibn Ishaq al Kindts Treatise 'On first philosophy ' (Pi al
falsafah al ula), trans. Alfred Ivry, Studies in Islamic Philosophy and Science (Albany,
1974), P- 58.

27 al Kindi, Oeuvres pMhsophiques, vol. II, pp. 11 17; al Kindi, al Kindt's metaphysics, pp. 56 60.

under the influence of arguments from Philoponus, rejects the common view
of Aristotle and the Neoplatonic tradition that the world is eternal, instead
insisting upon its creation. He further supports this conclusion by reasoning
that unity in individual things is accidental, not true unity, and that it must
have as an agent cause the One for creation in unity and existence, for
conservation in being, for motion, and for all the various forms of unity. In
the True One itself there is a unity of oneness and being requiring the denial of
attributes, though in all other things there must be caused unity as a necessary
condition for being. 'The cause of unity in unified things is accordingly the
True One, the First, and everything which receives unity is caused, every one
other than the One in truth being one metaphorically and not in truth' (fa kullu
wahidin ghayra al wahid bi 1 haqiqati fa huwa bi 1 majazi la bi 1 haqiqati). 28
A similar account of metaphorical predication and the derivative reality of
creatures is found in his Treatise on the one true [and] perfect agent and the deficient
agent which is [so] by metaphor. There al Kind! reasons that act (fi c l) is an
equivocal term only properly predicated of God whose act of creation (ibda^)
presupposes nothing in his true act of 'making existents to exist from non
existence' (ta'yis al aysat 'an laysa). 2,9 Secondary and metaphorical is the agency
of an intermediary which acts upon something else and yet is itself dependent
upon the agency of the Creator for the power by which it acts. But only the Creator
is an agent in the proper sense, presupposing no other agency, and providing agency
immediately and mediately to creatures acting in virtue of the Creator's true agency.
This account of primary and secondary causality was a commonplace of the
Neoplatonic tradition and is similar to that found in the Kitab al idahfi al khayr al

mahd mentioned earlier, another work associated with the circle of al
Kind!

In his philosophical psychology al Kind! writes of four intellects: three
are
characteristics of the immortal human soul and the fourth is the
transcendent
agent intellect in an interpretation of Aristotle's underdetermined
account in
De anima 3.5. Yet while he speaks of what is sensible in act being
acquired by
the soul, knowledge comes not through abstraction but in the
apprehension of
immaterial forms by intellect. The Platonist meaning of this is confirmed
in On
recollection, where al Kind! argues explicitly that sense perception
cannot
provide knowledge of intelligible forms, which it instead apprehends
through
its own essence in recollection. 30 Though the remote source is Plato,
rather

28 al Kindi, Oeuvres phihsophiques, vol. II, p. 95.

29 Ibid., p. 169.

30 Gerhard Endress, 'al Kindts theory of anamnesis: A new text and its
implications', in
Islao e arabismo na Peninsula Iberica: Actus do XI Congreso da Unido
Europaeia de Arabistas e
Islamologos (Evora, 1986).

542

Philosophy

than reaching back to his Phaedo for this doctrine, it seems likely that al
Kindt's

view results from late Neoplatonic debates over whether predicated univer
sals founded on the experience of sensibles of the world can be the source of
an intellectual understanding of the transcendent forms themselves; instead,
they may merely be promptings for the soul to recollect or otherwise apprehend transcendent eternal forms in the First Intellect. 31

Although it was eventually eclipsed in the tradition by the powerful and creative philosophical synthesis of Avicenna, the tradition of al Kindi continued
well into the fourth /tenth century. A follower in that tradition, al 'Amiri (d. 381/992) used philosophical texts in the interpretation of the Qur] an and
religious teachings of Islam. In his native Khurasan al 'Amiri studied with Abu
Zayd al Balkhi (d. 322/934), the well known geographer and polymath, who
apparently conveyed from al Kind! to his student the value of both philosophy
and religion in understanding God and creation. Of al 'Amiri' s works there
survive treatises on optics, predestination, the defence of Islam using philosoph
ical argumentation, a work on the afterlife and an interesting metaphysical text,
but none of his commentaries on the works of Aristotle. His familiarity with
works and arguments from the tradition of al Kind! is particularly evident in his
Kitab al amad 'ala I abad (On the afterlife) 32 in which al 'Amiri draws on Plato's
Phaedo to argue for the reward or punishment of the immortal soul and in his
Fusulfi al ma c alim al ilahiyya (Chapters on metaphysical topics) where he draws
on the Kitab al idahfi al khayr al mahd (Liber de causis) in its adaptation of portions
of the Elements of theology of Proclus. 33 Religion seems to play a more prominent
role in the works of al 'Amiri than in those of al Kindi, as indicated by the former's use of Qur'anic terms and phrases to label philosophical teachings.
Generally al 'Amiri held that philosophy plays a valuable complementary role to
that of religion in the immortal rational soul's quest for knowledge of the Creator and His creatures. As Wakelnig puts it, al 'Amiri 'wants to relate the

concepts of Neoplatonic philosophy closely to the Koran and the Islamic tradition, in order to show that philosophy and religion are in accordance

31 For the account of Porphyry, who may have been among the first to prompt debate of
this issue, see H. Tarrant, Tkrasylhn Platonism (Ithaca and London, 1993), pp. 108 47.

32 For the text with English translation and study see Everett K. Rowson (ed. and trans.),
A Muslim philosopher on the soul and its fate: al ' Amiri s Kitab al abad 'ala 1 abad (New
Haven, 1988).

33 For a valuable study of this work and al 'Amirf s extensive knowledge of metaphysical
texts of the Neoplatonic tradition see Elvira Wakelnig (ed. and trans.), Feder, Tafel,
Mensch: Al 'Amiris Kitab al fusul fi 1 ma'alim al ilahiya und die arahische Froklos Rezeption
im 10. Jh (Leiden, 2006).

with each other with regard to their objectives'. 34 It should also be noted that his
metaphysical reflections gave rise to his use of the term wajib al wujud ('neces
sary existent') in characterising divine existence, a notion that would be devel
oped extensively by Avicenna. 35

The rise of philosophy in the fourth /tenth century

While al Farabi is the most well known philosopher of fourth /tenth century

Baghdad, his era was one of a broad diversity of intellectual flourishing in
philosophy, kalatn, literature and much more, with ongoing translation, lively
philosophical and theological debate and methodologically multiple
approaches and teachings by a wide array of thinkers. It was in this period
that the iconoclastic philosopher and famous physician Abu Bakr al Razi (d. c.
313 23/925 35) taught clinical medicine at Rayy and Baghdad, wrote detailed
works of medicine widely known in Islam (and translated into Latin) and
infamously held that prophecy and revelation are not necessary. Little of the
philosophical work of al Razi survives, but from reports and what is available
it is clear he was much influenced by the Timaeus as well as other works by
Plato, and held a Platonic conception of the soul, 36 together with a powerful
aversion to revealed religion. In a well known debate in 320/932 the logician
and Aristotelian commentator Matta ibn Yunus, mentioned earlier as a trans
lator, famously defended logic as a universal tool transcending the grammar
of a particular language against Abu Sa'Id al Sirafi, who rejected that idea,
insisting that logic is merely a form of Greek grammar. Al Farabi had the
Christian Yuhanna ibn Haylan as a teacher for portions of the Organon and
apparently knew Matta. Yahya ibn 'Adi, another Syriac Christian, was a
student of al Farabi and became a leading figure as translator, philosopher
and theologian in the developing school of Baghdad Aristotelians. 37 Abu
Sulayman al Sijistanial Mantiqi (the logician) (d. c. 375/985), whose companion

34 Elvira Wakelnig, 'Metaphysics in al 'Amiri: The hierarchy of being and the concept of
creation', Medioevo, 32 (2007), esp. p. 46.

35 See Robert Wisnovsky, Avicenna's metaphysics in context (Ithaca, 2003), pp. 239 40.

36 Two of his important philosophical treatises are extant and available in English trans
lation, 'Spiritual medicine' and 'The philosopher's way of life'. See respectively, al Razi,

The spiritual physick ofRhazes, trans. A.J. Arberry (London, 1950); and Jon McGinnis and
David C. Reisman (ed. and trans.), Classical Arabic philosophy. An anthology of sources
(Indianapolis, 2007), pp. 36 44. For a general account of al Razi see L. E. Goodman,
'al Razi, Abu Bakr Muhammad b. Zakariyya', Eh, vol. VIII, pp. 474 5, available at www.
brillonline.nl/subscriber/entry?entry islam SIM 6267, Marquette University, 28
February 2009.

37 For a list of his writings see Gerhard Endress, The works of Yahya Ibn 'Adi: An analytical
inventory (Wiesbaden, 1977). Also see Griffith, The church in the shadow of the mosque,
pp. 122 7.

Philosophy

Abu Hayyan al Tawhldi recorded sessions of the circle of al SijistanI at Baghdad, led an intellectually rich group of thinkers, and himself held philos
ophy and religion as two distinct methods, philosophy concerned with the created realm and able to know only the fact of the existence of God, not the
divine nature itself. The original version of Abu Sulayman al SijistanI' s Siwan
al Hikmah, a historical account of philosophy, survives only in various abbre
viated versions. 38 As for the group's view of the role of philosophy in relation to
religion, Kraemer writes, 'The objective of the Falasifa was to enable society to
depart safely and gradually from the old beaten paths of inherited belief' 39 For
the I sma'lll branch of ShTism the key to the proper guidance of the community

in all matters depends upon a divinely inspired prophet. In their theological
descriptions the Isma'irJs drew deeply on Neoplatonic thought to express their
doctrines. In this tradition Abu Ya'qub al SijistanI (d. c. 361/971) stressed the
complete transcendence of God beyond all intelligibility, even insisting that
there be not a single but rather a double negation said of God. As Walker puts it,
'One states that God is not not a thing, not not limited, not not describable, not
not in a place, not not in time.' 40 During this period there was also under way the
assembling of the Rased! Ikhwan al Saja\ a religiously inspired collection of
treatises drawing on philosophical translations, Sufism, Ismail thought,
Qur'anic revelation, religious teachings, politics and science, with the aim of
the purification and salvation of the soul. 41 While by no means the sole concern
of those studying philosophy, the issue of philosophy and its relation to religion
was one of universal interest with a considerable variety of conclusions
reached.

al-Farabi (d. 339/950/.)

Although Abu Nasr al Farabi is often said to have been of Turkish ethnic origin,
the historical sources vary considerably. He probably came from the eastern part
of the empire to Baghdad, where he did most of his work for philosophical
studies, though he spent time in Damascus, Aleppo and Egypt before his death in
Baghdad. Al Farabi understood himself and his associates to be reconstructing
philosophy as practised in the Alexandrian tradition, according to his own account

38 See Joel L. Kraemer, Philosophy in the renaissance of Islam: Abu Sulayman al SijistanI and
his circle (Leiden, 1986), pp. ngS.

39 Ibid., p. xii.

40 Paul E. Walker, 'The Isma'rlis', in Adamson and Taylor (eds.), The Cambridge companion
to Arabic philosophy, p. 82.

41 For a recent brief account with a valuable bibliography and web links see Carmela
Baffioni, 'Ikhwan al Safa', in Edward N. Zalta (ed.), The Stanford encyclopedia of philos
ophy, available at plato.stanford.edu/entries/ikhwanalsafa/, first published 22 April
2008.

545

The New Cambridge History of Islam

in his Fi zuhur alfabafa (The appearance of philosophy), which significantly
makes no reference at all to the work of al Kind! or al Razi. 42 There al Farabi
relates that upon the arrival of Islam philosophical studies moved from
Alexandria to Antioch and finally, on the initiative of a few individuals, made
its way to Baghdad, where religious restrictions by Christians were dismissed
and al Farabi himself studied the entire Prior and Posterior analytics with Yuhanna
ibn Haylan. Focus was now on the proper curriculum and order of study, and in
particular the need to begin with logical studies, in which al Farabi himself was a
master, writing commentaries and paraphrases of the Organon and the Isagoge or
Introduction to the Categories of Aristotle by Porphyry. For al Farabi logic was
understood also to include rhetoric and poetics and itself to be a sort of
universal grammar of thought and reason, in contrast to the grammars of
particular languages. And demonstration is understood as that form of syllogistic
that yields absolute certainty, while other forms of syllogistic yield lesser states of

assent by the soul. 43 These logical notions played an important role in al Farabi's
understanding of the roles of citizens and leaders in the state where non demonstrative affirmations based on dialectical argumentation and rhetorical
suasion are seen to have important value for the formation of a societal community aspiring for the full attainment of happiness. Following the hier
archical account found in Plato's Republic, al Farabi argues in several works that
the perfect state is that in which the legislator, philosopher and imam are found
in a single person, while in less perfect cities these may be found in a plurality of
individuals, or perhaps not be found at all in those cities lacking proper hierarchy
and unity. This doctrine or political philosophy as philosophy of state involves a
special coincidence of logical teachings with those of cosmology, metaphysics
and philosophical psychology in al Farabi. 44

The cosmological and metaphysical scheme crafted by al Farabi situates the
First Cause as the First Being (al mawjud al awwal) and the eternal creative
emanative source for the existence (wujud) of all other beings and as itself free

42 This is noted by Dimitri Gutas in 'The "Alexandria to Baghdad" complex of narratives:
A contribution to the study of philosophical and medical historiography among the
Arabs', Document! e Studi sulla Tradizione Filosofica Medievale, 10 (1999), p. 155.

43 See Deborah L. Black, 'Knowledge (Him) and certitude (yaqln) in al Farabi's epistemol
ogy', Arabic Sciences and Philosophy, 16 (2006). On logic in al Farabi in its historical context
see the introduction by F. W. Zimmermann to his translation of al Farabi's commentary
and short treatise on Aristotle's De interpretatione (London, 1981).

44 For a recent synthetic account of the thought of al Farabi on these matters see Philippe

Vallat, Farabi et I'Ecole d ' Alexandria Des premisses de la connaissance a la philosophic
politique (Paris, 2004).

546

Philosophy

of every sort of deficiency. 45 The science that treats of the First Cause is
metaphysics, but it does so in so far as it treats of all being under the rubric of
being qua being. 4 Under the influence of another hybrid of Neoplatonism and
Aristotelianism, in this case traced to Ammonius at Alexandria, al Farabi
characterises the First Cause as the One in the most deserving sense (since
divisibility, corporeality, materiality, subject and beginning are all denied of it)
and also as at once intellect, understood, and understanding (fa anna hu c aqlun
wa anna hu ma'qulun wa anna hu 'aqilun). 47 Positive predication or naming
of the First Cause is permitted, albeit with the important restriction that these
names cannot have the meaning and level of perfection of created beings, but
instead must be predicated in accord with its ultimate and transcendent
perfection. 48 From the First Cause there emanates an intellect which thinks
(ya'qilu) its own essence and that of the First, and from the latter another
intellect results as well as the outermost heavens. This begins a series of
mediated emanations of celestial bodies and intellects extending to the elev
enth intellect in the hierarchy which is the Agent Intellect (al l aql alfa"al)
associated with the sphere of the moon and the sub lunar world.

The Agent Intellect, charged with governance of the sublunary realm in
some works but called the emanative cause of it in others, plays an essential role
in human reason and in the guidance of humanity through prophecy. Following

Alexander of Aphrodisias and most of the Greek tradition, al Farabi understands
the Agent Intellect to be both an eternal immaterial entity existing in actuality
separate from the world and also as intimately involved in human epistemol
ogy. In an account of intellect only superficially similar to that of al Kindi, al
Farabi explains that the intellectual apprehension necessary for the formation of
universals takes place thanks to the Agent Intellect which provides something
like light to the material intellect', that is, provides soul with a power by which it
transfers (yanqulu) intelligibles that 'come to be from the sensibles which are
preserved in the imaginative power , 49 In this way it abstracts or extracts

45 al Farabi, On the perfect state (Mabadi' ara' ahl al madina al fadila), ed. and trans. Richard
Walzer (Oxford, 1985), p. 57.

46 This is significant because it entails a rejection of the approach of al Kindi, who
described Divinity as the object of both metaphysical and religious investigation. In
contrast, al Farabi holds the consideration of the First Cause as a special part of
metaphysics and assigns religion to a position subordinate to political governance.

47 al Farabi, On the perfect state, pp. 68 and 70 respectively.

48 al Farabi, al FdraU's The political regime (al Siyasa al madaniyya also known as the
Treatise on the principles of beingsj, ed. Fauzi Najjar (Beirut, 1964), p. 49.

49 al Farabi, On the perfect state, p. 202. The term material intellect derives from Alexander of
Aphrodisias. While immaterial in itself, the material intellect derives its name from its
receptivity, which also exists, though in a different sense, in matter. Marc Geoffroy

The New Cambridge History of Islam

(tantazi'a) forms of material things in the mimetic power of imagination and
receives them as actualised intelligibles in the material intellect. 50 With this
power now existing as intellect in act, the separated and immaterial intelligibles
themselves can be the objects of human intellection at a new level al Farabi calls
acquired intellect. No longer requiring a body for its activity, the human soul
can then rise in a transformation or realisation into its immaterial substance as
intellect at the level of the Agent Intellect. For al Farabi the attainment of the
human end to which the Agent Intellect directs the soul is happiness in the
perfection of intellect by voluntary action and individual effort in the context of
human society. The conditions for this achievement must be provided by society, even though the majority are brought to truth not by demonstration
and the high intellectual methods of the philosopher but rather by rhetorical or
dialectical persuasion. For this reason the mimetic power of imagination is
needed by the prophet to represent the intelligibles received from the Agent
Intellect for the guidance of humanity in persuasive images for the formation of
society in the way most suitable for the attainment of happiness. 51 Religious
teachings here function as mimetic representations of true philosophy made
suitable in a particular culture and at a level appropriate to those incapable of
the fullness of philosophical understanding 52

Avicenna (d. 428/1037)

It is especially fortunate that the most influential philosopher in the history of
Islamic thought, Ibn Sina or Avicenna, wrote an autobiography which is extant
with a continuation by Abu c Ubayd al Juzjani. 53 There he relates that his father

argues that al Farabi may never have read Aristotle's De anima but instead relies on
Alexander. See his 'La tradition arabe du Peri nou d' Alexandre d'Aphrodise et les
origines de la theorie farabienne des quatre degres de l'intellect', in Cristina
D'Ancona and Giuseppe Serra (eds.), Aristotele e Alessandro di Afrodisia nella tmdizione
Araba, Subsidia Mediaevalia Patavina 3 (Padua, 2002).

50 Al Farabi, Alfarabi: Risalatfi 1 'aql, ed. Maurice Bouyges, SJ, 2nd edn (Beirut, 1983), p. 12.
On this issue see Richard C. Taylor, 'Abstraction in al Farabi', Proceedings of the American
Catholic Philosophical Association, 80 (2006).

51 On this understanding, the thought of al Farabi is a continuing development of the
philosophical tradition in the societal context of Islam rather than a break and an
advancement of a new science of politics. Regarding the former see Dominic
O'Meara, Platonopolis: Platonic political philosophy in Late Antiquity (Oxford, 2005); regard
ing the latter approach see Christopher A. Colmo, Breaking with Athens: Alfarabi as
founder (Lanham, MD, 2005).

52 Therese Anne Druart observes that al Farabi seems to have held that ethics necessarily
involves religion for all with the exception of the true philosopher. See her 'al Farabi
(870 958): Une ethique universelle fondee sur les intelligibles premiers', in Louis Leon
Christians et al. (eds.), Droit naturel: Relancer Vhistoirei (Brussels, 2008), p. 231.

53 For this and other sources on the life of Avicenna see William E. Gohlman, The life of Ibn
Sina: A critical edition and annotated translation (Albany, 1974). The most comprehensive

Philosophy

was a government administrator and Isma'ili follower who, after moving to
Bukhara, arranged for teachers for Avicenna, who proved to have extraordinary
intellectual talents. His study of the Qur'an completed by the age of ten,
Avicenna was provided with teachers in jurisprudence and then, beginning
with the Isagoge of Porphyry, in philosophy, in which he quickly excelled his
teachers. By sixteen he was distinguished in law and medicine, and proceeded
deeper into philosophy, creating a collection of notes and proofs for himself as
he proceeded through all the branches of the discipline. His only bump in the
road was frustration with the Metaphysics of Aristotle which he claims to
have read forty times, and even memorised, without grasping its purpose. But
thanks to the chance purchase of al Farabl's Fl aghrad kitab Ma ba'd al tabi'a
(On the aims of Aristode's Metaphysics), Avicenna was able to come to a clear
vision of Aristotle's end, one very different from al Kindf s identification of
religious theology and metaphysics. 54 Noteworthy for the understanding of the
philosophical thought of Avicenna is the absence of reference to studies in a
particular school of thought or circle of teachers in which he learned the ways of
philosophical analysis and argumentation in a particular tradition. Rather, aside
from some modest guidance in his pre teen and early teen years, he relied on
his own remarkable powers of intellect and approached texts of philosophy

with a genuine openness that led to new philosophical doctrines that have
had powerful and continuing influence on the development of philosophy in
Islam, and also in the West through Latin translations. His most influential
teachings are in metaphysics, and in particular concerning the nature of God.

According to Avicenna God must be conceived as the Necessary Being, the
sole being necessary in itself, and as the sole entity in which existence (wujud)
and essence (mahiyya) are in complete unity. This is most clearly expressed in
his latest major work, his Isharat wa tanbihat (Pointers and reminders), where
in the section on 'Existence and its causes' he distinguishes essence from
existence, argues for the need of an efficient cause of existence, and sets forth
his account of necessity and possibility in essences. Dismissing what is impos
sible in itself, he reasons that every chain of caused beings must be finite or
infinite and must be founded on a being which is the Subsistent and is itself the
Necessary Being (wdjib al wujud). Since every being is either necessary in its
own right or possible in its own right, and even an infinite causal chain of
possible beings cannot bring about the realised necessity of a possible being,

guide to the development of the philosophical thought of Avicenna is Dimitri Gutas's
invaluable Avicenna and tfte Aristotelian tradition: Introduction to reading Avicenna' s philo
sophical works (Leiden, 1988).
54 Gutas, Avicenna and the Aristotelian tradition, pp. 238ff.

549

then there must be a being necessary in itself as an uncaused cause extrinsic to
the chain as its term and foundation. This is the unique Necessary Being,
which is without definition and can be indicated by no one but he who
possesses intellectual knowledge in purity, although its existence can be
established by consideration of being itself 55 The compact late account in
Isharat wa tanbihat combines distinct arguments set forth elsewhere in
Avicenna, some of which have sources in early Islamic kalatn. As Wisnovsky
has shown, 56 Avicenna's famous distinction of existence and essence is rooted
in theological issues concerning the ontological status of 'thing' (shay') as
requiring a divine determinative cause for its existence, and also in al Farabi's
metaphysical analysis of existent and thing. That distinction appears in his
earlier Metaphysics of the Shift? where in book i, chapter 5, Avicenna considers
the notions or meanings of the existent (al mawjud), the thing (al shay') and the
necessary (al damn), and proceeds to argue that the first conceived is the
necessary (al wajib). His famous analysis of necessity and possibility is then
found in chapter 6, where he dismisses the impossible and argues that 'what
ever is possible in existence (mumkin al wujud) when considered in itself, its
existence and nonexistence are both due to a cause'. 57 On the basis of an
analysis which has its roots in his careful consideration of Aristotle on
necessity, 58 Avicenna then reasons with a new and widely influential argu
ment that all that exists owes its instantiation to a necessitating that can be
traced to God as the Necessary Being. In book 8 of the same work he goes on
to offer argument for the finitude of essential causes and to conclude for the
Necessary Being as uncaused and itself a first cause ('illatun ghayra ma'lulatin
wa 'illatun ula), 59 from whom eternally emanates the celestial hierarchy of
intellects, bodies and soul (book 9), which come to an end in the Agent
Intellect functioning as emanative cause of the world of generation and
corruption and all its forms. For the great majority of philosophers and
many theologians who followed, Avicenna's metaphysical teachings were

55 Avicenna, al Isharat wa I tanbihat, ed. S. Dunya, 4 vols. (Cairo, i960 6), see vol. IV,
pp. 7ff.; trans A. M. Goichon in Von Sina, livre des directives et remarques (Beirut and Paris,
1951), PP- 35off.

56 See Wisnovsky, Avicenna's metaphysics in context, pp. 145 ff. For a short account see
Robert Wisnovsky, Avicenna and the Avicennian tradition', in Adamson and Taylor
(eds.), The Cambridge companion to Arabic philosophy, pp. 92 136.

57 Avicenna, Avicenna: The metaphysics of the healing, trans. Michael E. Marmura (Provo,
UT, 2005), p. 31,

58 See Wisnovsky, Avicenna's metaphysics in context, pp. 197 217; and Wisnovsky, Avicenna
and the Avicennian tradition', pp. 115 19.

59 Avicenna, The metaphysics of the healing, p. 258.

550

Philosophy

simply accepted as providing the terminology and agenda for later philosoph
ical and theological discussions of God and creatures.

While Avicenna was the dominant influence in metaphysics for centuries, his
philosophical psychology contained some teachings that hampered its widespread
acceptance. For, while Islam and Christianity both held for the resurrection of the
body in the afterlife, Avicenna's philosophical argumentation, under the influence

of the late Neoplatonic school of Ammonius at Alexandria, : held that the rational
soul alone survives the death of the body. Created by emanation in a suitably
disposed material preparation in the womb and individuated by its initial relation
ship with body, the rational soul for Avicenna remains separate from the body,
functioning as its final cause and existing immaterially, as Avicenna repeatedly
reminds his readers with his famous 'flying man' in which the soul recognises its
own existence even in the absence of sensation. 2 The body and its senses also
serve the rational soul in the formation of knowledge on the part of the soul.
Sense perception of the world is conveyed through abstraction (tajrid) to the
common sense, then to the retentive imagination, and then to the active com
positive imagination. Avicenna also asserted the existence of an intuitive power
(hods), responsible for quick or even immediate and certain insight into the
middle term of a syllogism, or prophetic intuitive knowledge. These internal
powers are responsible for prenoetic bodily stages of abstraction, and it is at this
level that the estimative power (wahni) present in all animals apprehends non
sensible characteristics (intentions, ma'aniri) such as those involved in the sheep's
fear in the presence of a wolf. Memory and recollection complete his account of
the internal powers related to sense. Abstractions are formed by use of these
powers in the brain, although for Avicenna intelligibles in act are not realised in
human understanding without the involvement of the Agent Intellect which is
said to provide an emanation (fayd) of intelligible forms to the soul or to realise a
conjoining (ittml) with the Agent Intellect. The human receptive (i) material
intellect comes to be (ii) possible intellect (or dispositional intellect ('aql bi I
malakaj) when it has the primary principles of thought whereby it can become

60 On the development and influence of Avicenna's metaphysical thought see Jules
Janssens, 'Bahmanyar ibn Marzuban: A faithful disciple of Ibn STna?', in David
C. Reisman (ed.), Before and after Avicenna: Proceedings of the First Conference of the
Avicenna Study Group (Leiden and Boston, 2003); and Jules Janssens, 'Bahmanyar, and
his revision of Ibn Sina's metaphysical project', Medioevo, 32 (2007). Also see Heidrun
Eichner, 'Dissolving the unity of metaphysics: From Fakhr al Din al Razi to Mulla Sadra
al ShtrazI', Medioevo, 32 (2007); and the articles by Mayer, Al Rahim, Rizvi and Takahashi
in the bibliography to this chapter.

61 See Wisnovsky, Avicenna's metaphysics in context, pp. 21 141; Wisnovsky, Avicenna and
the Avicennian tradition', pp. 96 104.

62 Michael Marmura, 'Avicenna's "Flying Man" in context', Monist, 69 (1986).

551

(iii) the perfection of this power as intellect in act (c aql bi Ifi'l) as able to know at
will previously attained intelligible forms. This latter is intellect in potency in
comparison to (iv) acquired intellect Qaql mustafad) which is the immediate state
of actual conjoining with the Agent Intellect and apprehending intelligible forms.
Those intelligibles in act exist as such only in the Agent Intellect with the result
that for the actuality of knowledge the rational soul, which is without intellectual

memory, reverts to conjoining with the Agent Intellect which provides the forms
for human intellection as well as those constituting the world when the receptive
subject is suitably disposed. 63 Prophecy also occurs intuitively in a select few
through a natural emanation from the Agent Intellect or Holy Spirit.

al-Ghazah (d. 505/1111)

The philosophical accounts of al Farabi and Avicenna conveyed an intellectually
powerful understanding of the world, human nature and the Creator; but
significant parts of their views conflicted with common Islamic religious tenets,
and prompted the Ash'arite theologian and teacher al Ghazali to attain a
mastery of parts of philosophy in order to craft a detailed response. Based on
philosophical studies reflected in his summary of Avicennian thought in the
Maqasid alfaJasifa (Intentions of the philosophers), 64 al Ghazali authored his
incisive Tahdfut alfaJasifa (Incoherence of the philosophers) 65 as a revelation of
the philosophers' dissimulations and as a detailed refutation indicating the
inadequacy of the arguments of the philosophers for key positions. In particular
he held that they and their followers should be condemned as unbelievers for
three metaphysical doctrines: (1) denial of resurrection of the human body on
the last day; (2) denial of God's knowledge of particulars; and (3) assertion of the
past and future eternity of the world. Particularly interesting are his accounts of
agency and causality. In the third discussion al Ghazali argues that the very
notion of agency must include that of will such that the philosophers' assertion
that the world emanates necessarily by divine agency is incoherent. Rather,
God as agent of the world acts by a will free of all determination other than that
of the will itself. In the seventeenth discussion al Ghazali famously denies that

63 This account is based on Avicenna' s De anima (Arabic text) being the psychological part of

Kitab al shifa', ed. F. Rahman (London, 1959), pp. 48 ff. The often used term wahib
al suwar, 'the giver of forms', appears at Avicenna, The metaphysics of the healing, p. 337.

64 The Maqasid alfaldsifa is based on Avicenna's Persian Danish nama i ald'i. Regarding an
untided work by al Ghazali on the metaphysical thought of the philosophers, see Frank
Griffel, 'MS London, British Library Or. 3126: An unknown work by al Ghazali on
metaphysics and philosophical theology', Journal of Islamic Studies, 17 (2006).

65 See al Ghazali, The incoherence of the philosophers /Tahdfut alfaldsifa, a parallel English
Arabic text, ed. and trans. M. E. Marmura (Provo, UT, 1997).

552

Philosophy

there is a necessary connection between cause and effect, asserting a doctrine of
occasionalism which places all causal agency immediately with God. There
al Ghazali also provides a second account closer to the philosophical account of
primary and secondary causality which also finds in God the causality for all
events. Whether al Ghazali in fact prefers this second philosophical account is a
matter of controversy among scholars today. While the Tahafut was written
to combat the ways of the philosophers, al Ghazali's strong approval of the
value of philosophical logic and natural philosophy in his Tahafut, his
al Munqidh min al dalal (Deliverance from error), and some other works con
tributed influentialry to the introduction of methods of logic and natural

philosophy into kalam. Even some doctrines of metaphysics, which al Ghazali
specifically condemns, were eventually adopted from Avicenna by the kalam
tradition in a way that allowed the introduction of methods from the foreign
science of philosophy into traditional discussions of kalam. Though he taught
the value of religious faith and tradition, al Ghazali's analysis in the Munqidh
comes to the conclusion that the most certain and fulfilling method is that of the
Sufi way of life in the immediacy of the mystical experience (dhawq). 67

Fabafa in Andalusia

In the western lands of Islam philosophy rose to prominence in the twelfth
century, though texts from the east were available earlier. This is clear in the
Jewish poet Solomon Ibn Gabirol (d. c. 1058), who wrote the philosophical
dialogue Mekor hayyim (known as Fons vitae in its highly influential Latin
translation) which espoused a doctrine of universal hylomorphism crafted
under the influence of the Plotiniana Arabica, among other works.

The first major Muslim philosopher was Ibn Bajja/Avempace (d. 533/1139),
who was a poet and philosopher as well as a person of political engagement
serving different times as vizer, emissary or judge (qadT), with these involve
ments perhaps contributing to his death in Fez reportedly by poisoning. He
was deeply interested in Aristotelian natural philosophy, to which he applied a

66 An analysis with reference to the issues and literature is available in Frank Griffel,
'al Ghazali', in Edward N. Zalta (ed.), The Stanford encyclopedia of philosophy, available at
http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/al ghazali/, first published 14 September 2007.

67 Al Ghazali, al Munqidh min al dalal/Erreur et delivrance, ed. and trans. F. Jabre (Beirut,
1959), Arabic p. 44; English trans. Richard Joseph McCarthy SJ in Freedom and fulfillment:

An annotated translation ofal Ghazali's al Munqidh min al dalal and other relevant works by
al Ghazali (Boston, 1980), p. 100; repr. as al Ghazali's path to Sufism (Louisville, 2000).

68 See Sarah Pessin, 'Jewish Neoplatonism: Being above being and divine emanation in
Solomon ibn Gabirol and Isaac Israeli', in Daniel H. Frank and Oliver Leaman (eds.) The
Cambridge companion to medieval Jewish philosophy (Cambridge, 2003).

new conception of the dynamics of motion and argued against Aristotle's rejection of motion in a void, possibly under some influence of the writings
of John Philoponus. In philosophical psychology Ibn Bajja wrote a De anima after
Aristotle; but in that and also in his Risala ittisal al l aql bi I insan (On the conjoining of the intellect with human beings) and his Risala al wadff (Letter
of farewell) the influence of al Farabi and critical arguments from the Neoplatonic tradition are evident. Following al Farabi in part, Ibn Bajja pre
sented an account of the formation of abstractions from sense in which imag
ination plays a double role of spiritualising (or de materialising) forms or intentions and of being the subject for abstractions in so far as it functions as
the personal material intellect belonging to each human being individually. 9
But under the influence of Neoplatonism Ibn Bajja rejected Aristotle's Third
Man Argument in critique of the Platonic Theory of Forms and insisted that true
intelligibles are not intentions abstracted from experience of imperfect partic
ulars, but rather are those found united in the transcendent Agent Intellect.

Efforts at abstraction from sensory experience can never yield more than the
imperfect content of the objects experienced. Hence, human epistemological
advancement through the stages of abstraction is merely preparatory for the
soul's gradual ascent from ideas through ideas to ideas found in the Agent
Intellect. Science and the attainment of knowledge in all their levels are in this
way the means to the end of ultimate human happiness in an immaterial uniting
and conjoining with the Agent Intellect. 70 In his Tadbir al mutawahhid (Rule of
the solitary) he speaks of the happy in an imperfect city, explaining that the life
of the body must be renounced since it is without happiness, while the spiritual
is to be embraced for its nobility. But it is the life of the wise person or
philosopher that is virtuous and divine, for it is through intellectual under
standing of transcendent intellects that he comes himself to be intellect and
attain a kind of divinity and perfect happiness. This can come to pass only if one
declines association with those devoted to the body and pursues association
with those who are spiritual, and ultimately with those who are at the highest
level of intellect. 71

69 Ibn Bajja, Risalat ittisal al 'aql bi I insan, ed. and trans. Miguel Asin Palacios in 'Tratado
de Avempace sobre la union del intelecto con el hombre', al Andalus, 7 (1942), pp. 1 47,
Arabic pp. 13 16; English trans, in McGillis and Reisman (ed. and trans.), Classical Arabic
philosophy.

70 See Alexander Altmann, 'Ibn Bajja on man's ultimate felicity', in Harry Austryn Wolfson
jubilee volume, 3 vols. (Jerusalem, 1965) vol. I.

71 For a recent and very valuable short account of Ibn Bajja and his works see Josep Puig
Montada, 'Ibn Bajja', in Edward N. Zalta (ed.), The Stanford encyclopedia of philosophy,

Philosophy

A very different approach to the imperfection of human cities and the goal
of the philosopher is found in the philosophical novel Hayy ibn Yaqzan by the
physician Ibn Tufayl (d. 581/1185^) who also served as vizier to the caliph Abu
Ya'qub Yusuf (d. 580/1184). Under inspiration from Avicenna's allegorical
Epistle of Hayy ibn Yaqzan, Ibn Tufayl crafted the story of Hayy with two
possible beginnings. The first is that he was born to the king's sister, who
sought to save this child of a secret marriage by setting him to sea in a small
boat which reached a deserted isle where the child was discovered and raised
by a gazelle. The second account has it that a mixture of material constituents
advanced to the point of being a preparation sufficient for the reception of a
human soul from God (after Avicenna). Passing through several stages of
development, Hayy learns natural science and even the nature of the soul,
advancing to reason the necessary existence of a First Cause for the world and
the heavens. Displaying obvious Sufi influence, Hayy realises that his fulfil
ment is to be found in imitating the ways of the Necessary Being and in
exercises leading to the mystical vision of the Divine. But the life of Hayy
changes through a meeting with a visitor, Absal, who pursues the deeper inner
meanings of religion and had left behind his contemporary, Salaman, who
prefers the literal and surface interpretation of religious law. Hayy eventually
learns language and Absal explains to him the ways of organised religion that
guides the mass of humanity in their weakness of mind and will. At the

opportunity of a passing boat, the two travel to the island city ruled by
Salaman. There Hayy views the ignorance and preference for passions and
sensory pleasures of the people of that society in their inability or unwill
ingness to know and to follow the true ways of God. He and Absal then retreat
from the island of Salaman and return together to their contemplative ways on
Hayy's island. With this story Ibn Tufayl expressed despair for the masses in
imperfect societies and endorsed the need for the individual through Sufism to
find happiness and transcendent mystical fulfilment in the inner reaches of the
human rational soul independent of the strictures of traditional religion. 72

Averroes (d. 595/1198)

Ibn Rushd/Averroes was trained in law (fiqh), as were his father and his famous
grandfather, for whom he was named, and put skills of careful textual scholar
ship and of persuasive argumentation to work both in his professional career as
lawyer and judge and also in his philosophical studies. He was known in the

72 See Josep Puig Montada, 'Philosophy in Andalusia: Ibn Bajja and Ibn Tufayl', in
Adamson and Taylor (eds.), The Cambridge companion to Arabic philosophy .

philosophical tradition in Islam though no school based on his thought was
established and no great prominence was given to his writings. In the Latin west

he was a figure of enormous influence through his purportedly demonstrative
commentaries on the works of Aristotle, which taught theologians and philos
ophers of medieval Europe how to understand Aristotle's difficult texts. There
his work soon engendered condemnation for its support of the genuinely
Aristotelian doctrines of the eternity of the world and of happiness attainable
in the earthly life, and for his own novel doctrine of the unique separately
existing material intellect shared by all human knowers. In the initial wave of
Latin translations in the early thirteenth century there were included none of his
dialectical writings written for a less expert audience: his legal treatise Fad al
maqal, his short explanatory al Masa'il allati dhakara ha al shaykh Abu al Walldfi
'Fasl al maqal' (Treatise on what Averroes mentioned in the 'Decisive treatise'),
his theological al Kashf 'an mandhij al adilla fi c aqa'id al nulla (Explanation of
the sorts of proofs in the doctrines of religion) and his detailed response to
al Ghazali in the Tahafut at tahafut (Incoherence of the incoherence).

Today he is perhaps best known in the Muslim world for his Fad al maqal
(Book of the distinction of discourse and the establishment of the relation of
religious law and philosophy), 73 a much misunderstood work sometimes
superficially thought to provide a harmonious account of the conciliation of
reason and philosophy with revelation and religious tradition in a way
respecting each fully and equally as sources of truth and knowledge of God
and his creation. Written as a sort offatwa or legal determination regarding
whether philosophy and logic should be permitted, prohibited or commanded
either as recommended or required, the Fad al maqal is a carefully crafted
dialectical treatise arguing for the priority of philosophy with its method of
demonstrative reason over all other methods in the determination of the
meanings and import of religious revelation and tradition. Key to its argument
are the equivocal meanings of al nazar as religious reflection or Aristotelian
theoretical science; qiyas as religious analogical reasoning or Aristotelian

syllogistic; and i'tibar as religious consideration or scientific inference explained at the very beginning of Aristotle's Posterior analytics. These equiv
ocations allow Averroes to substitute philosophical meanings for the theo
logical and to assert that 'this method of reflection (al nazar) which religious
Law has called for is the most perfect of the kinds of reflection by the most

73 With this translation I follow A. El Ghannouchi, 'Distinction et relation des discours
philosophique et religieux chez Ibn Rushd: Fasl al maqal ou la double verite', in R. G.
Khoury (ed.), Averroes (1126 1198) oder der Triumph des Rationalismus: Internationales
Symposium anlasslich des 800: Todestages des islamischen Philosophen (Heidelberg, 2002).

Philosophy

perfect kind of qiyas which is called demonstration (burhan)', that is, the most
perfect and certain method of philosophy. With this reasoning and the principle, 'Truth does not contradict truth but rather is consistent with it and bears witness to it', which is taken directly from the Prior analytics (1.32)
without mention of its source in Aristotle, 74 Averroes declares the unity of
truth in a way that permits philosophy with its certain (al yaqin) method of
demonstration a place of priority in the judgement of what is true in all matters, including religion. This is simply because philosophical demonstra
tion by definition itself contains truth with necessity per se, while assent (tasdiq) through rhetorical persuasion or on the basis of dialectical assump
tions does not contain truth per se but only per accidens. With this methodo
logical approach established, Averroes goes on in the Fad al maqal to

reinterpret the three issues for which al Ghazali charged the philosophers
with unbelief and to affirm precisely what al Ghazali had claimed as unbelief
in two matters: (1) scripture itself supports a sense of eternality for the world
since the Qur'an mentions God's throne and also water as prior to creation, a
view reconcilable with the eternality of matter and the efficacy of God in
Aristotle; (2) God's knowledge is neither of universals nor of particulars since
both of those are posterior to sensation; rather, God's knowledge is distinct
from both since it is causative of particulars and universals. As for (3) resur
rection of the body, in the Fad al maqal he declares it obligatory for unscientific
people (minghayr ahl al Him) and says it is unbelief to deny it. 75 But in al Kashf
c an manahij al adilla fi ^aqcCid al milla he explains that its true purpose is to
help the majority of humanity who live by their imaginations to reflect upon
immateriality and perhaps attain something of a proper understanding of the
invisible God/ 6 This is significant because in his demonstrative Aristotelian
commentaries and other strictly philosophical works Averroes finds no room
for a teaching on the immortality of the soul. 77

74 See Richard C. Taylor, '"Truth does not contradict truth": Averroes and the unity of
truth', Topoi, 19 (2000).

75 Averroes, Ibn Rushd (Averroes): Kitabfasl al maqal, ed. George F. Hourani (Leiden, 1959),
pp. 16 17. trans. Charles E. Butterworth with facing page Arabic text as Averroes: The
book of the decisive treatise determining tfie connection between the law and wisdom ir epistle
dedicatory (Provo, UT, 2001).

76 Ibn Rushd, al Kashf 'an manahij al adilla fi 'aqa'ul al milla, ed. Muhammad 'Abid al Jabri,
2nd edn (Beirut, 2001) pp. 147S., trans. Ibrahim Najjar in Averroes' exposition of religious

arguments (Oxford, 2001) pp. 64ff.

77 The distinction between dialectical and demonstrative works is indicated at Averroes,
Averroes: Tahafot at tahafot, ed. Maurice Bouyges, SJ (Beirut, 1930), pp. 427 8; trans.
Simon Van Den Bergh as Averroes' Tahafut al tahafut (The incoherence of the incoherence),
2 vols. (London, 1969), vol. I, pp. 257 8.

557

The New Cambridge History of Islam

In philosophy Averroes composed early short commentaries (Mukhtasarat or
JawamV) often concerned with key issues, paraphrasing middle commentaries
(sing, talkhls), detailed long commentaries (sing, shark or sharh kabif) containing
the complete text of Aristotle, a very Aristotelian Commentary on the Republic of
Plato, and a brief Commentary on the De intellectu of Alexander ofAphrodisias, as
well as shorter works on various topics, including a valuable collection of essays
under the title De substantia orbis. The Long commentaries on Aristotle 'sDeanima,
Physics, De caelo, Posterior analytics and Metaphysics are generally thought to
contain his most sophisticated and mature teachings. In his mature physics he
follows Aristotle's account of the eternity of the world, and reasons that God is
the unmoved mover of the outermost heavens. In metaphysics he argues for
God as pure act and thought thinking thought with knowledge of the universe
only in so far as He knows Himself as the cause of all being through a final

causality that refers all other beings to the ultimate perfection of the
First. In the
early pages of his Tafsir ma ba'd al tabVa (Long commentary on the
Metaphysics)
he even goes so far as to assert that the study of metaphysics constitutes
the
most complete worship of God: 'The sharVa specific to the philosophers is
the
investigation of all beings, since the Creator is not worshipped by a
worship
more noble than the knowledge of those things that He produced which
lead to
the knowledge in truth of His essence may He be exalted!' 78

Averroes' most controversial and perhaps least well understood
teachings
concerned the nature of human intellect, a doctrine that developed
through
various stages in his short, middle and long commentaries on Aristotle's
De
anima, as well as in five other works. Throughout his works Averroes
followed the common tradition holding for a transcendent Agent Intellect
involved in human intellection. The point of most contention in his
thought
was the nature of the receptive material intellect. In the short
commentary he
holds for a plurality of individual intellects, and follows Ibn Bajja in
holding
that the human material intellect is a disposition of the forms of the imagi
nation. In the later middle commentary he retains the plurality of
intellects
and eschews his earlier view of the material intellect as too closely
associated
with a power of the body truly to be intellect. He then argues that the
human
material intellect must be a disposition separate from matter yet
belonging to
the human being from whom it derives its individuation. In his final
position
in the Long commentary on the De anima Averroes spells out a doctrine
of the
transference of intentions in the abstraction of intelligibles from the

78 Averroes, Averroes Tafsir ma ba'd at tab? at, ed. Maurice Bouyges, SJ,
4 vols. (Beirut, 1938
52), vol. I, pp. 10. 11 16. This particular text was not available in the
Latin translation.

Philosophy

experience of the world through the internal powers of the soul and the
abstractive 'light' of the Agent Intellect which comes to be 'form for us'.
He
goes on further to insist on the unity of intelligibles for the sake of
common
discourse and science (relying on reasoning from the Paraphrase of the
De
anima by Themistius) and concludes to the existence of a second
transcen
dentally existing intellect, the unique Material Intellect shared by all
human
beings. In this new doctrine of intellect Averroes finds that both these
tran
scendent Intellects must be 'in the soul' to be used by the individual
knower at
will. For Averroes this very activity of intellectual understanding through
use
of these two transcendent Intellects constitutes the end for human beings
and
ultimate human happiness. Here and also in his other two commentaries
on
the De anima there is no argument or provision for the Islamic religious
doctrine of resurrection or for personal immortality. 79

In 591/1195, just three years before his death, Averroes and his writings
were condemned, he was exiled from Cordoba for a time, and philosophy
was
banned. Although the reasons for this may have been political, there is
little
doubt that his philosophical rationalism pushed at the limits of Islamic
tolerance at a time when philosophy in the east had already been moving
away from Aristotelian rationalism towards becoming a truly Islamic
philos
ophy with the integration of key religious doctrines of Islam. While his
sons
are reported to have carried his books to the court of Frederick II

Hohenstaufen at Sicily, ° Averroes and his students formed no school to
continue his methodological approach in the lands of Islam. Instead, his
thought proved to be powerfully influential in Jewish circles, where
his authority displaced that of Aristotle, J and in Christian Europe, where
his teachings were variously embraced, challenged, condemned and
revivified
through the period of the Renaissance.

Sufi mysticism and a very distinctive philosophy of mystical unity and
experience was already present in Andalusia in the person of Ibn al
'Arab!

79 For a detailed discussion of the development of his doctrine of
intellect see the
introduction to Averroes, Averroes (Ibn Rushd) of Cordoba: Long
commentary on tfte De
anima of Aristotle, trans. Richard C. Taylor, with Therese Anne Druart
(New Haven and
London, 2009).

80 See Charles Burnett, 'The "Sons of Averroes with the emperor
Frederick" and the
transmission of the philosophical works by Ibn Rushd', in Gerhard
Endress and Jan
A. Aertsen (eds.), Averroes and the Aristotelian tradition: Sources,
constitution and reception
of the philosophy of Ibn Rushd (1126 1198): Proceedings of the Fourth
Symposium Averroicum,
Cologne, 1996 (Leiden, 1999).

81 See Steven Harvey, Arabic into Hebrew: The Hebrew translation
movement and the
influence of Averroes upon Jewish thought', in Daniel H. Frank and Oliver
Leaman
(eds.), The Cambridge companion to medieval Jewish philosophy
(Cambridge, 2003).

559

(d. 638/1240) who when very young is said to have met Averroes. Islamic
philosophy was soon also to appear in many thinkers such as the widely
travelled Andalusian philosopher Ibn Sab c in (d. 669/1270), who reflected this
movement with a philosophical approach learned in Aristotelianism and
Neoplatonism but constituted as Sufi mystical wisdom.

al-Suhrawardi (d. c. 387/1191)

In the tumultuous era of the Crusades, the warrior ruler of Egypt, Syria and
Mesopotamia, Saladin (d. 589/1193), recaptured Jerusalem in 1187 from the
Christians, who had held it for nearly a century. The Christian response in the
form of the Third Crusade four years later initiated a debilitating military
struggle which came to an end in 1192 with a truce with Richard the
Lionhearted. In 1183 the mystic and philosopher Shihab al Din Yahya
al Suhrawardi had come to recendy captured Aleppo, now governed by
Saladin's young son, who came under the influence of this unorthodox and
popular philosopher. In 1191 Saladin, already fully engaged with the
Christians,
apparently became concerned over the stability of his hold on Aleppo and the
sway al Suhrawardi wielded over his son. In that year Saladin ordered the
execution of al Suhrawardi, who may well have suffered death in connection
with his philosophical views. While those views were perhaps Platonic in
political matters, the philosophy set forth by al Suhrawardi was a novel
construction of his own making. Well versed in the history of philosophy
and in the Peripatetic tradition of al Farabi and Avicenna, al Suhrawardi
attacked the distinction of essence and existence in things set out by
Avicenna as merely a conceptual distinction in the mind, not in the reality
of things.

Al Suhrawardi also rejected that tradition's epistemological foundations
for the apprehension of intelligibles and essential definitions purportedly
grasped through abstraction or emanation. Rather, true apprehension of real
essences is not mediated, but rather found in the unmediated presence (huduf)
of the known to the knower. Al Suhrawardi expounds this new teaching in his
Hikmat al ishraq (The philosophy of illumination), where he explains his
Platonism with an implicit reference to the mystical account of Plotinus

found in the Theology of Aristotle. He writes:

Plato and his companions showed plainly that they believed the Maker of the
universe and the world of intellect to be light (nur) when they said that the
pure light is the world of intellect. Of himself, Plato said that in certain of his
spiritual conditions he would shed his body and become free from matter.
Then he would see light and splendor within his essence. He would ascend to

560

Philosophy

that all encompassing divine cause and would seem to be located and sus
pended in it, beholding a mighty light in that lofty and divine place.

For al Suhrawardi the Platonic forms and the transcendent intellects of the
tradition as well as human knowers are essentially lights, for light requires no
mediation but only its own presence to make itself known. From the creative
Light of Lights (God) come all the other lights, varying in intensity as well as
other things, including time, which is without beginning or end. In this meta
physics it is the task of human beings to transcend the shadows of corporeality
and realise themselves as lights. Fully integrating into his philosophical account
passages of the Qur'an and urging his readers to the ways of prayer and religious
observance, al Suhrawardi crafted both from a critical epistemology and from his
own mystical experiences a distinctive illuminationist metaphysics of light as a
hikma (wisdom) encompassing in a unitary way religion and philosophy.

Rejection and integration of falsafa

The prolific and influential theologian Fakhr alDTn al Razi (d. 606/1209) in his
early years became well versed in philosophy and read Avicenna broadly. He
furthered al Ghazali's openness to the value of philosophical logic and argumen
tation by use in his own reasoning, but he was a deeply committed Ash'ari. He
rejected Avicenna' s metaphysical teachings on emanationism and the restriction of
divine knowledge to universals and instead embraced the atomism and occasion
alism characteristic of the Ash'arite traditions emphasis on divine power, though
with some significant modifications. While he frequently wrote in favour of a
thoroughgoing determinism, he found the issue of determinism and freedom
without a satisfactory resolution. He wrote: 'There is a mystery (sirf) in [this issue];
viz. that proving the existence of God compels one to uphold determinism
(jabf) . . . while proving prophecy compels one to uphold [human] autonomy
(qudra). For if man does not act autonomously, what use is there in sending
prophets and in revealing scriptures?' 83 However, Avicenna had a lasting impact on
the discussion of metaphysical matters in both kaJam and falsafa, as thinkers from
both traditions used and developed his thinking and influenced one another. 84 The

82 al Suhrawardi, The philosophy of illumination, ed. and trans. John Walbridge and Hossein
Ziai (Provo, UT, 1999), p. no. Also see John Walbridge, 'Suhrawardi and illumination
ism', in Adamson and Taylor (eds.), Tfie Cambridge companion to Arabic philosophy.

83 Ayman Shihadeh, Tfte teleological ethics of Fakhr al Din al Razi (Leiden, 2006), p. 39.

84 See, for example, the discussion of the metaphysical issue of al umur al 'amma and the
subject of metaphysical science as developed in those traditions through the centuries

with various interactions from Fakhr al Din al Razi to Mulla Sadra in Eichner,
'Dissolving the unity of metaphysics'.

561

The New Cambridge History of Islam

Kitab al mawaqiffi Him al kalam (Book of stations on the science of kalam) by the
Ash'arite theologian 'Adud alDin allji (d. 756/1355) also displays a powerful
proficiency in philosophical argumentation, both in its critical assessments of the
reasoning of the falsafa tradition and in its philosophical theology in the kalam
tradition. In six parts, this work deals with theory of knowledge and syllogistic
proof, issues of ontology, unity and causality, atoms, substance, accidents and
astronomy, God and divine attributes, actions etc. (ilahiyyat), faith, prophecy and
more. There he rejects the notion of knowledge by presence and prefers to
understand knowledge as a created attribute. 85 Sabra rightly cites the work of al
Iji as an example of 'the overcoming offabafa by kalam' and as an example of what
the philosopher of history Ibn Khaldun (d. 808/1406) considered a mixing of falsafa
and kalam, which generally resulted in making "the one discipline ... no longer
distinguishable from the other'".

Efforts to integrate falsafa into Islam, found in the followers of al Kindl, most
notably in al 'Amiri, and also in al Suhrawardi, were continued in connection
with interpretation of Avicenna's late al Isharat wa I tanbihat (Pointers and
reminders), the last section of which was read in accord with developing

mystical and illuminationist philosophical accounts. Nasir al Din al Tusi (d. 672/1274), a Shri well known for his influential Akhlaq i nasiri (Nasirian
ethics), responded to Fakhr al Din al Razi in his own commentary on al Isharat
wa I tanbihat. 87 He embraced Avicenna's account of possible and necessary
being leading to the assertion of the Necessary Being and furthered the mystical reading of Avicenna with his commentary on Avicenna's Epistle of
Hayy ibn Yaqzan. Qutb al Din alShtrazi (d. 710/1311) studied Avicenna's al Isharat wa I tanbihat with al Tusi and wrote his own commentary on Hikmat al ishraq (The philosophy of illumination) by al Suhrawardi. These
were the beginnings of a philosophical tradition of thinkers united by their
interest in the integration of philosophy, religion, mysticism (under the influence of Ibn al Arab! and his followers) and illuminationism, culminating
in the founding of the 'School of Isfahan' by MTr Damad (d. 1041/ 1631) and Sadr

85 'Adud al Din al Iji, Kitab al mawaqiffi Him al kalam, ed. 'Abd al Rahman 'Umayrah, 3 vols.
(Beirut, 1997), vol. I, pp. 582ff. This text and others are cited by A. I. Sabra in 'Science and
philosophy in medieval Islamic theology: The evidence of the fourteenth century',
ZGAIW, 9 (1994), pp. 18 ff. Also see Josef van Ess, Die Erkennetnislehre des 'Adudaddin al
Id: Ubersetzung und Kommentar des esten Buches seiner Mawaqif (Wiesbaden, 1966).

86 Sabra, 'Science and philosophy', p. 13.

87 See Toby Mayer, 'Fakhr ad Dm ar Razi's critique of Ibn STna's argument for the unity of
God in the Isharat, and Nasir ad Din at Tusi's defence', in David C. Reisman (ed.), Before
and after Avicenna: Proceedings of the First Conference of the Avicenna Study Group (Leiden
and Boston, 2003).

Philosophy

al Din al Shirazi or Mulla Sadra (d. 1050/ 1640), whose thought continues as
foundational to modern philosophy in contemporary Iran. This can be seen in
The principles of epistemobgy in Islamic philosophy: Knowledge by presence 89 ' by the
late Iranian ShTite philosopher Mehdi Ha] iri (d. 1999), who received a doctorate
at the University of Toronto and followed in that tradition but also integrated
aspects of Western philosophy into his work. 9 °

88 On 'first philosophy' and 'divine science' in the metaphysical thought of Mulla Sadra see
Riidiger Arnzen, 'The structure of Mulla Sadra's al Hikma al mutta'aliya fi I asfar al
'aqilyaa al arba'a and his concepts of first philosophy and divine science: An essay',
Medioevo, 32 (2007).

89 Mehdi Ha'iri Yazdi, The principles of epistemology in Islamic philosophy: Knowledge by
presence (New York, 1992).

90 Also see Hossein Ziai, 'Recent trends in Arabic and Persian philosophy', in Adamson
and Taylor (eds.), The Cambridge companion to Arabic philosophy.

563

22

The sciences in Islamic societies

(750 1800)

SONJA BRENTJES WITH ROBERT G. MORRISON 1

Introduction

The study of the non religious scholarly disciplines in Islamic societies has
mostly focused on elite writings, instruments and, occasionally, images.
A vertical historical approach that compares texts, tables or instruments pro
duced at different places and times has prevailed over a horizontal approach
that situates a scholar within the complex environment of his time and space.
The vertical approach favoured the comparison between ancient Greek
achievements and those of scientists in Islamic societies. During recent deca
des a minority of historians of mathematics have focused on the comparison of
achievements by scientists in Islamic societies with those of later Western
scholars.

A corollary of the vertical approach is its preference for the study of
outstanding achievements over more ordinary ones, the correct over the
erroneous and the realistic over the symbolic. Historical questions such as
whether mathematicians and astronomers in Islamic societies preferred Greek
theories, models and methods over their Indian and Persian counterparts, and
if so, why, have been answered primarily by pointing to cognitive superiority
(better models, exact methods, more difficult subjects, axiomatic and deduc
tive structure) to the neglect of other possible factors involved in such
decisions. In contrast, the overarching theme of this chapter is the complex
relationships between the work of scientists and physicians and the societies
that they lived in.

The expressions scholarly disciplines and science(s) used in this chapter
render the Arabic Him (pi. Hilum). Although there is a strong religious
connotation to Him in particular, the reader of this chapter should note

1 The section entitled The Islamic aspects of cosmology, astronomy and astrology is
written by Robert Morrison.

564

The sciences in Islamic societies

that this word and its plural were also used to denote other fields of know
ledge such as mathematics or astronomy. It is hoped that using its modern
equivalents as well as the less value laden term scholarly disciplines is a
tolerable compromise.

The translation movement

The translation movement was the court sponsored process of massive trans
lations of Pahlavi, Sanskrit, Syriac and Greek texts on philosophy, astro
nomy, astrology, mathematics, theoretical music, alchemy, magic, divination,
human and veterinary medicine, gnomology, princely ethics, agriculture,
military science and some history that took place between the second half
of the second/eighth and the late fourth/tenth centuries, primarily in
Baghdad. Many historians consider this process either exclusively or primarily
as the translation of Greek books from the late eighth to the late ninth or early
tenth centuries. They see this process as focused upon writings by leading Greek
and Hellenistic scholars such as Hippocrates, Plato, Aristotle, Archimedes,
Euclid, Apollonius, Diophantus, Ptolemy, Galen and Dioscorides. The motives
and objectives that caused this massive cross cultural transfer of knowledge

under the first Abbasid caliphs and their courtiers are seen as answering the
practical needs of the new dynasty, among them astrological and medical
concerns. Ritual duties of the Muslim community such as praying at particular
times and in specific directions are thought to have inspired an interest in
various mathematical disciplines. Religious debates that brought together mem
bers of various Christian Churches, Manichaean dualists, Mazdakites, Jews and
adherents of various Muslim factions left Muslim disputants in an uncomfort
able position, as they were unfamiliar with the various tools of pre Islamic
philosophical and theological debates. It has been argued that a handful of
'Abbasid caliphs promoted enlightened, tolerant and rational values in a politics
that was opposed to obscurantism and literalism. Professional and cultural
aspirations and the needs of mostly Christian physicians are often seen as the
most important single factor that stimulated the translation of Greek texts into
Syriac and Arabic.

This concept of continuity, utilitarianism and enlightenment focuses pri
marily on the scholarly aspects of the movement and exaggerates the impor
tance of some of its contributors. It leaves unexplored the social and cultural
factors that sustained two hundred years of heavily financed and highly visible
efforts to acquire and transform knowledge of pre Islamic provenance. In
1998 Gutas offered a new perspective that tried to explain the translation

The New Cambridge History of Islam

movement as a social and cultural phenomenon. 2 The major points he raised seem to be well founded. The survival of Hellenic and Hellenistic philosophy, science and medicine was affected by the rupture between Orthodox Byzantium and Hellenism and by the schisms within the Christian Church. 3 As a result, Nestorian and Monophysite communities in

Sasanian Iraq and Iran pursued a substantially truncated practice of Hellenism.

Certain Coptic communities outside Alexandria continued to cultivate her metic medical and alchemical teachings. The so called Sabian communities of

northern Iraq resisted pressures to abolish their adoration of the planets and

taught a mixture of hermetic gnosticism and mathematical astrology. All these

communities were freed from Byzantine Orthodox control after the Arab Muslim armies conquered Syria, Palestine, Egypt, Iraq and Iran. The abolition

of Byzantium's oppressive control was a major factor behind the cultural possibilities open to the Umayyads and the 'Abbasids.

The second major factor was the material improvements that followed the

conquests. A new Pax Islamica united territories formerly divided by crown,

Church and war. Trade, crafts and agriculture profited from increased secu

rity, stability, the repair of irrigation, new crops and the migration of people

and husbandry. 4 But the end of Orthodox oppression and the material better

ment of life did not bring about a substantial Umayyad translation movement.

The locus of the Umayyad caliphate (41 132/661 750) in Byzantine Syria and Palestine with its Greek speaking Orthodox majority among the popula

tion did not encourage such a cultural transformation. The few translations

into Arabic that occurred under Umayyad rule were undertaken on the initiative ofmawali of possibly Persian descent, that is, newly converted clients

of Arab tribes, who served as secretaries in the administration, as well as by

Arabic speaking Nestorians in Iraq and by unidentified astrologers in the north west of the Indian subcontinent. 5 Some of these translations were already part of the cultural environment of the c Abbasid revolt, which started

around 102 3/719 20.

2 Dimitri Gutas, Greek thought, Arabic culture: The Graeco Arabic translation movement
in Baghdad and early 'Abbasid society (2nd 4th/Sth 10th centuries) (New York and
London, 1998).

3 Ibid., pp. 176 86.

4 Ibid., pp. 11 14, 17 20.

5 Ibid., pp. 25 7; David Pingree, 'Astronomy and astrology in India and Iran', Isis, 54 (1963);
Mario Grignaschi, 'Un roman epistolaire greco arabe: La correspondence entre Aristote
et Alexandre', in M. Bridges and J. C. Biirgel (eds.), The problematics of power: Eastern and
Western representations of Alexander the Great, Schweizer Asiatische Studien, Monograph
22 (Bern, Berlin, Frankfurt am Main etc., 1996).

6 See also Gutas, Greek thought, Arabic culture, p. 27.

The sciences in Islamic societies

The translation movement was primarily caused by forces that opposed the
Umayyad dynasty and sought to restore pre Islamic Iranian rule and splen
dour. Iranian groups in Khurasan were among those who fought for this. As
part of these efforts and as a result of the slowly changing linguistic patterns in
Iran, Iranian members of the anti Umayyad movement, including those who
fought for a Sasanian and Zoroastrian revival and hence against any kind of

Arab Islamic rule, established translating as one of their political and cultural
tools, and drew on Sasanian precedent and anti Macedonian cultural and religious rhetoric. 7

It has been argued that the Sasanian propaganda of re collecting Zoroastrian
scripture, the Avesta, and re translating wisdom shattered by Alexander of
Macedonia (d. 323 BCE) and his marauding troops after the defeat of Dara
(Darius III, r. 336 331 BCE) did not lead to a broad and sustained cultural process
of translating Greek works on philosophy and the sciences. While it is undis
puted that such translations took place, their limited number and thematic scope
has been seen as an argument against Gutas's view of the importance of the
Sasanian model. This argument overlooks that the emphasis of the Sasanian
propaganda was first and foremost on religious knowledge. Wisdom and practical secular knowledge came second. Although the disciplinary breadth
was substantially smaller than in the later translation movement sponsored by
the Abbasids, Sasanian pro translation propaganda was more than mere prop
aganda. It reflected historical events and managed to create a cultural climate
favourable to translating scholarly writing. The importance of this sort of
translation was accepted by Iranian scholars, nobles and priests for several
centuries after the fall of the empire itself, including those who already had
converted to Islam, as references to the Sasanian politics of translation in the
Denkard and Abu Sahl ibn Nawbakht's (fl. second/ eighth century) report in his
Kitab al nahmutan fi I mawalid indicate.

It is possible that the historical memory as described in eighth and ninth
century Zoroastrian sources such as the Denkard might be a construction
based on what happened during the 'Abbasid rebellion and under the two
Abbasid caliphs, al Mansur (r. 136 58/754 75) and al Ma'mun (r. 198 218/
813 33), who were responsible for adopting and implementing the politics of
patronising and commissioning translations of Middle and New Persian,
Sanskrit, Syriac and Greek books into Arabic. Nevertheless, the fact that

7 Ibid., pp. 47 50.

8 Ibid., pp.36 7,39 40. See also Ibn al Nadim, The Fihrist of al Nadim, trans. Bayard Dodge,
2 vols. (New York, 1970), vol. II, p. 651, note 67.

translating was represented as a major cultural tool of the anti Umayyad movement both by its Abbasid beneficiaries and their Iranian clients is indubitable. In this sense the translation movement owes its origins and cultural force to Zoroastrian imperial ideology. This imperial ideology saw
all knowledge as ultimately derived from the Avesta. Knowledge was lost for
the Iranians through Alexander's material destruction of the Holy Book. It was
transferred to the Greeks because Alexander had ordered the translation into
Greek of those parts of the Avesta that he saw fit. From this event, the story
concludes, Greek philosophy, science and medicine had their beginnings. Rulers of the two subsequent Iranian dynasties, the Arsacids (284 BCE 22.6
CE) and the Sasanians (226 642 CE), are remembered with declarations, prescriptions and testaments that call for re collecting the scattered remnants
of Zoroastrian wisdom including those parts that had in the mean time been
translated into foreign languages. 9 By drawing on this complex pre Islamic
propaganda, translating was legitimised and justified as an imperial cultural
activity for the 'Abbasid movement and dynasty. It is only when the process of

courtly sponsored and encouraged translations was well under way at the end
of the eighth and the beginning of the ninth centuries that translations from
Greek became important. It took at least several decades before Islamic
scholars considered Greek philosophy and science as superior and neglected
the other cultural components of the translation movement.

The decision by the caliph al Mahdi (r. 158 69/775 85) around 166/782 to
order the Nestorian patriarch and caliphal counsellor Timothy I to translate
Aristotle's Topics was an important step in extending the scope of translations
and integrating the local Aramaic elite in that activity. Al Mahdi chose the
book because it taught dialectics, the art of argumentation. It gave support to
the use of demonstrative proofs and dialectic disputations as major tools
among the early practitioners of kaldm. m Al Mahdi' s decision was part of a
political strategy to maintain and consolidate Abbasid power against the
resurgence of pre Islamic Iranian doctrinal debates and the emergence of
strong non Islamic tendencies among members of the 'Abbasid administrative
personnel. The memory of these conceptual clashes is preserved in later
Arabic books on usul al din with their standard references to the arguments
raised by dualists, naturalists, natural philosophers, astrologers and geometers
against positions held by Mu'tazilites, Qadarites and other religious factions of
the first 'Abbasid century. It is also reflected in reports by Muslim historians

9 Ibid., pp. 41 5.
10 Ibid., p. 65.

568

The sciences in Islamic societies

such as al Mas'udi (d. 345/956), who described al Mahdi's politics as directed
against followers of religious doctrines by Marcion (c. 140 CE), Bardesanes
(154 222 CE) and Mani (216 77 CE). Al Mahdakhbari ordered the mutakallimun
to write books against these doctrines.

Al Mahdi's turn to Aristotle was not, however, the beginning of a process
that would lead directly to his dream of Aristotle. (Al Ma'mun is reported
to have had a dream in which Aristotle appeared and the caliph interrogated
him about what was good.) The following of Iranian cultural patterns con
tinued under Harun al Rashid (r. 170 93/786 809), who is credited with the
establishment of the Bayt al Hikma, often hailed as a scientific academy and the
centre of the Graeco Arabic translation movement. The data about this institu
tion as reported in Arabic historical sources such as Abu Ja c far Muhammad ibn
Jarlr al Tabari's (d. 311/923) Ta'nkh (Annals), Ibn al Nadlm's Kitab alfihrist
(Catalogue) and later books does not, however, support such an interpretation. 11
These sources, enriched by poetry, suggest that the Bayt al Hikma was a library
where rare books on history, poetry and strange alphabets were collected and
which was established when al Mansur structured the administration of his
court and empire along the lines of Sasanian tradition. 12

A second institution little mentioned in the context of the c Abbasid trans
lation movement was the hospital funded by Harun al Rashid's vizier, Yahya
ibn Khalid al Barmaki (d. 189/805). According to Ibn al Nadim, Yahya ibn
Khalid paid several physicians from India to run the hospital, to translate
books on medical subjects from Sanskrit into Arabic and to collect pharma
ceutical plants and drugs in India and bring them to Baghdad. 13 As well as this
transfer of mainly medical knowledge Yahya ibn Khalid ordered that a book
should be written about the doctrines various peoples in India believed in. Ibn

al Nadim claims to have had access to the Arabic report to Yahya ibn Khalid in
a manuscript owned and annotated by Abu Yusuf Ya c qub ibn Ishaq al Kindi
(d. c. 256/870), the major philosopher of the third/ninth century. 14 These
activities confirm that the influx of Indian scholarly knowledge in the later
decades of the second/ eighth century into Baghdad also was directly con
nected with the Abbasid court and its cultural politics. The descent of the
Barmakid family from Zoroastrian and Buddhist clergy apparently contri
buted to the vizier's specific interest in and attention to knowledge and

11 Marie Genevieve Baity Guesdon, 'Le Bayt al Hikma de Baghdad', Arabica, 39 (1992);
Gutas, Greek thought, Arabic culture, pp. 54 60.

12 Gutas, Greek thought, Arabic culture, pp. 54 9.

13 Ibn al Nadfm, Fihrist, trans. Dodge, vol. II, pp. 590, 710, 826 7.

14 Ibid., pp. 826, 831 2.

569

The New Cambridge History of Islam

goods from India. The larger relevance of such knowledge consisted in its
contribution to 'an atmosphere of culture' as Ibn al Nadim wrote about
the entrance of the Jewish secretary, physician and convert to Islam 'All ibn
Sahl al Tabari (d. 247/861) into the circle of boon companions of the caliph
al Mutawakkil (r. 232 47/847 61). I5

Adherence to Sasanian style imperial politics and the preference for political
astrology and translations continued until the second half of the 810s. Things

changed when al Ma'mun decided to return to Baghdad. In 203/818 he left
Marw after executing his mentor, general and vizier al Fadl ibn Sahl (d. 203/
818). Arriving in Baghdad, al Ma'mun had to pacify the ravaged city, convince
the local elites of his capability to effectively quell all opposition and gain
loyalty from at least some of their factions. According to later Islamic histor
ians he achieved these goals by turning to Mu'tazilite doctrines and by
allegedly introducing Greek philosophy and science. 16 This representation of
the caliph's politics reflects the success of al Ma'mun's legitimising propa
ganda. He did not introduce Greek philosophy and science into Abbasid
society; he merely showed favour to the translation movement that was
already under way. The application of Mu'tazilite concepts as state doctrines
also occurred relatively late in his life, after he had tested other possibilities
in particular, cooperation with the ShTa. What unified al Ma'mun's various
efforts to solve his manifold problems was the adoption of an absolutist
interpretation of Islam which defined the caliph as the sole arbiter of ortho
doxy and the reinforcement of the politics of centralisation adopted by his
great grandfather al Mansur. Coinage, military and fiscal reforms were part of
this new politics, as was his new foreign policy. The major factor behind the
enormous growth of the translation movement was al Ma'mun's introduction
of a philhellenic anti Byzantinism. 17

As in the case of the earlier application of Zoroastrian imperial ideology,
al Ma'mun's new philhellenic imperial ideology brought with it new trans
lations, new social elements and specific practices. Universalists such as
al Kind! emerged. He was one of the most radical and comprehensive prac
titioners of the new intellectual programme. It was through his personal patron
age, teaching and writing that many Aristotelian and pseudo Aristotelian as well
as Neopythagorean and Neoplatonic writings on philosophy were translated
into Arabic, commented upon and recast as a philosophy in a Muslim

15 Ibid., p. 697.
16 Gutas, Greek thought, Arabic culture, pp. 77
17 Ibid., pp. 83 95.

community. 18 Professionally defined specialists such as Yuhanna ibn Masawayh
(d. 243/857), a Nestorian physician from Gondeshapur and court physician to
Harun al Rashid and subsequent Abbasid caliphs, engaged in systematic trans
lations of Greek medical works as translators and patrons. While most historians
consider the translation of Greek medical books to be the result of professional
exigencies rather than as a part of courtly patronage, the fact that before
al Ma'mun's new politics developed most medical translations apparently
were made from languages other than Greek suggests that Ibn Masawayh' s
activities as well as those of his students and collaborators were also closely
connected to 'Abbasid cultural politics, rather than being merely an effort to
bring Abbasid medical teaching in line with the late Alexandrian curriculum. 19
The stories of the translocation of Alexandrian medical and philosophical
teaching via intermediary stops in Syria and northern Iraq to Baghdad should
also be placed in the context of the stress on Abbasid superiority as the result of
Muslim acceptance of ancient Greek knowledge. One of the most outspoken
formulations of this connection is given by Ibn Jumay' (d. 594/1198), court
physician of the first Ayyubid sultan, Saladin (Salah al Din, r. 564 89/1169 93).
He claims that if it had not been for al Ma'mun, 'medicine and other disciplines

of the Ancients would have been effaced and obliterated just as medicine is
obliterated now from the lands of the Greeks, which had been most distin
guished in this field'. 20 When compared to the variant told by the Christian
scholar Job of Edessa (second third/eighth ninth centuries), it becomes
obvious that the account of al Ma'mun's involvement in the transfer of Greek
and Hellenistic knowledge is an embellishment that does not describe simple,
straightforward historical facts, but reflects values attached to al Ma'mun's
politics. 21

When weighing the merits of these new views on the social history of the
translation movement, it has to be taken into account that previous accounts
overstressed the importance of ancient Greek, Byzantine and Christian com
ponents. Well into the first half of the third/ninth century 'Abbasid scholars

18 Gerhard Endress, 'al Kindi iiber die Wiedererkennung der Seele: Arabischer
Platonismus und die Legitimation der Wissenschaften im Islam', (Mens, 34 (1994),
pp. 179 84.

19 Manfred Ullmann, Handbuch der Orientalistik, division I, supplementary vol. VI, section 1
(Leiden, 1970); Felix Klein Franke, Vorlesungen iiber die Medizin im Islam, Sudhoff Archiv,
supplement 23 (Wiesbaden, 1982).

20 Hartmut Fahndrich (ed.), Ibnjumay': Treatise to Salah ad Din on the revival of the art of
medicine, Abhandlungen fur die Kunde des Morgenlandes XLVI, 3 (Wiesbaden, 1983),
p. 19.

21 Gutas, Greek thought, Arabic culture, pp. 92 4.

worked with concepts and methods from different pre Islamic cultures. Even
with the preponderance of Greek and Hellenistic concepts and methods from
the late third/ninth century onwards, scientific knowledge from other cul
tures was never completely eradicated. Problems, methods, parameters,
techniques and instruments of Indian, Iranian, Mesopotamian and Chinese
origin either remained available as alternatives to Greek and Hellenistic
knowledge or were merged with this knowledge. Moreover, the scholarly
world of 'Abbasid Iraq and Iran was by no means homogeneous, for some of
the scholars who worked on religious, historical and philological themes
looked at the translations of Greek philosophical books and Indian arithmetic
with scorn, disdain or condescension. Scholars who were primarily engaged in
the sciences took different positions on such questions as whether algebra was
inferior and number theory superior to geometry, whether astrology was the
queen of all sciences or not a science at all and whether divination from the
cooked shoulder blades of sheep was part of Greek philosophy.

Patronage and education

Court patronage was the major element that provided the necessary means to
carry out the translations. Most of the c Abbasid caliphs of the second /eighth
and third/ninth centuries were involved in this patronage in various forms
(receiving dedications; employing professionals as tutors and healers; inclu
ding Muslim and non Muslim scholars in their cultural entourage; paying
stipends and giving gifts). The caliphs alone, however, could not have main
tained the depth and breadth of this process. Numerous viziers, starting in the
second /eighth century with the Barmakids al Khalid and Yahya and continu

ing in the third/ninth century with al Fadl ibn Sahl or Abu Saqr Isma'il ibn
Bulbul, generals such as Tahir ibn Husayn (d. 207/822), administrators such as
the Banu Nawbakht and courtiers such as al Kindi, the three Banu Musa
Muhammad, Ahmad and al Hasan and the Banu al Munajjim contributed
their own funds to the enterprise. In addition to the money they spent, the
courtiers and administrators invested cultural capital. They shaped the trans
lation movement and the kind of knowledge and practices that sustained it by
composing scholarly works and by installing circles for teaching and discus
sion. Such majalis were also held by caliphs. They were an important courtly
institution that elicited the necessary interest for further patronage and
sponsorship.

One major result of courtly patronage for the ancient sciences of the third/
ninth century was the formulation of scientific programmes that were linked

The sciences in Islamic societies

to different religious and political outlooks. Al Kindi, for instance, worked to
create a scientific philosophy in Arabic for Muslims that harmonised pre
Islamic Arabic, Neoplatonic, Aristotelian and hermetic knowledge as well as
belief about all parts of the universe (the heavens, nature, the human body,
fate, society and the afterlife) in the form of a systematic exposition, deductive
structuring and demonstrative proofs. 2,2 The Banu Musa followed a different
course by focusing primarily on the mathematical sciences such as geometry,

astronomy, optics and mechanics. Al Kindi mainly worked with high ranking
Christian clergy such as Habib ibn Bahrlz, the Nestorian metropolitan of
Mosul, and descendants of Byzantine nobility such as Yahya ibn Batriq. The
Banu Musa sided with leaders of the Shu'ubiyya such as the Banu al Munajjim,
funded Christian professionals such as Hunayn ibn Ishaq (d. 260 or 264/870 or
873) and Ishaq ibn Hunayn (d. 298/911) and trained gifted Sabians such as the
money lender Thabit ibn Qurra (d. 288/901). The different religious, political
and scientific goals of al Kindi and the Banu Musa turned them into bitter
enemies.

A second important result of courtly patronage for the ancient sciences was
the reliance on cross denominational cooperation. This included Nestorians,
Jacobites, Sabians, Greek Orthodox, Sunms, Shi'a, Zoroastrians and Jews.
Only members of the medical profession expressed rivalries, tensions and
enmities as religious difference. Religious difference was, however, only one
factor that shaped the fortunes of a discipline at the 'Abbasid court. Galenism,
for instance, emerged as the leading medical theory and practice during the
third/ninth and fourth/tenth centuries because of the higher number of its
practitioners compared to competing practitioners, their better local avail
ability, more extensive networks, better literary skills and the greater political
power of their patrons. 23

In the fourth/tenth century the diversification of the 'Abbasid empire into
a number of vassal as well as independent dynasties such as the Tahirids
(205 59/820 72), the Samanids (261 389/874 999) and the Hamdanids

22 al Kindi, al Kindt's Metaphysics: A translation ofYa'qub ibn Ishaq al Kindt's treatise 'On first
philosophy' (H al falsafah al ula), trans, with introd. and commentary Alfred L. Ivry,
Studies in Islamic Philosophy and Science (Albany, 1974); al Kindi, 'Kitab fi 'ilm al katif :

Textvs arabicvs et translatio anglica. Cvra et stvdio Gerrit Bos et Charles Burnett', in
Gerrit Bos, Charles Burnett, Therese Charmasson, Paul Kunitzsch, Fabrizio Lelli and
Paolo Lucentini (eds.), Hermetis trismegisti astrologica et divinatoria (Turnhout, 2001),
pp. 290 3; Endress, 'al Kind! fiber die Wiedererkennung der Seele', p. 179.

23 Keren Abbou, 'Medicine and physicians in the 'Abbasid court, from the reign of
al Mansur until al Mutawakkil', MA thesis, Ben Gurion University (2000), pp. 69 91;
aljahiz, Tfie hook of misers, trans. R. B. Sergeant (London, 1996), pp. 86 7.

573

The New Cambridge History of Islam

(317 94/929 1003) and the emergence of rivals such as the Andalusian Umayyads
(138 422/756 1031) and the North African and Egyptian Fatimids (297 567/
909 1171) broadened the opportunities for scholars as new courts, cultural centres
and intellectual policies appeared. Decentralisation as well as anti Abbasid
policies inside and outside the caliphate shaped the funding and sponsoring of
philosophy, astronomy, medicine, geometry, optics, botany and alchemy. The
Umayyads in Cordoba sought to emulate Abbasid cultural splendour, while at
the same time cooperating with Byzantium and the Fatimids. 24 The Fatimids
turned to Neoplatonic philosophy as a helpful tool for formulating their theory of
the imamate and to back up their claims to genealogical legitimacy. The Buyids

drew upon three major strands of cultural politics: pre Islamic Sasanian heritage;
Arab culture; and Shfite belief. The ancient sciences constituted one aspect of
Buyid princely education in Arab court culture. Their patronage flourished at the
courts in Baghdad, Rayy, Shiraz, Isfahan and Hamadhan. Competition with the
Abbasid court probably provided an additional impetus. Similar motives led
rulers in Central Asia, eastern Iran, Syria and northern Iraq to attract astrologers,
philosophers, physicians and 'engineers' to their courts and to pay for the
copying of treatises by ancient and Muslim authors.

The strong cultural role of Buyid viziers as tutors of princes, together with
their own splendid sponsoring of the arts and sciences, suggests that the
support for these two cultural domains at courts in subsequent Islamic
societies, in particular in Iran and Central Asia, was partly the result of the
cultural identity of the vizierate. 25 Family networks created by intermarriage
diversified the patronage of the sciences below the level of rulers and princes.
Several generations of physicians, geometers, astronomers and historians
came from families linked with the 'Abbasid and Buyid courts such as the
Bukhtishu's, the Ibn Qurras and the al Sabi's. In later centuries such family
networks formed around the madrasa, where they brought together jurists,
hadith scholars, astronomers and physicians.

Court patronage for the sciences continued to flourish after the end of
the Buyid and Fatimid dynasties. 2 Several courts included physicians and

24 Marie Genevieve Baity Guesdon, 'Medecins et hommes de sciences en Espagne musul
mane (Ile/VIIIe Ve/XIe)', Ph.D. thesis, Sorbonne (1988), pp. 106 25.

25 See R. N. Frye, 'The Samanids', in R. N. Frye (ed.), The Cambridge history of Iran, vol. IV:
From tfte Arab invasion to the Saljuqs (Cambridge, New York, Melbourne and Madrid,
1975), PP- 142 3-

26 Heinz Halm, The Fatimids and their traditions of learning (London, 1997), p. 71, Yahya
Michot, 'Varietes intellectuelles ... L'impasse des rationalismes selon le Rejet de la
Contradiction d'Ibn Taymiyyah', in Carmela Baffioni (ed.), Religion versus science in
Islam: A medieval and modern debate, Oriente Modemo 19, 3 (2000), p. 602.

astrologers among those who had to be addressed by special honorific titles
according to courtly protocol, and these professionals were treated as being of
equal reputation and standing as the judges and the students of the Qur'an and
hadith. The best known examples are the courts of the Ottomans, Safavids and
Mughals. 27 The Mamluks (648 922/1250 1517) in Egypt are a rare exception.
They acknowledged only physicians as worthy of such treatment. 2 This does
not mean, however, that the Mamluks did not seek astrological counselling.
Their approach to this discipline took a different course. They regarded it as a
minor element of the practice of a new class of astronomical professionals,
which they sponsored through religious donations and by appointments to
madrasas and mosques. Muwaqqits, as these new professional astronomers
were called, came to be regarded as full members of the class of'ulama\ and
hence received the same honorific titles as the judges and imams. The change

is illustrated in the shift of emphasis between Ibn Khallikan (d. 681/1282), who
does not mention a single muwaqqit in his biographies, and Shams al Din al Sakhawi (d. 902/1496) almost two centuries later, who included a good number of muwaqqits in his dictionary. [2,9]

The courtly salon culture continued to be promoted by later dynasties too.
Administrators, boon companions, jurists, poets, musicians, Sufis, gramma
rians, transmitters of hadith, astrologers, physicians and people with an inter
est in metaphysics as well as natural philosophy populated its sessions and
dominated its atmosphere. A specific kind of scientific literature emerged within this salon culture the genre of questions and answers. [30] Several later encyclopaedias such as the Nawadir al tabadur (Rarities of spontaneity)
of Shams al Din al Dunaysiri, compiled in 669/1270, and the NafaHs alfununfi
'araHs al c uyiin (The precious arts of the choice brides) by Shams al Din al Amuli (d. 752/1352), dated around 741/1340, were created in this framework.
Both literary genres indicate that courts played a major role for the dissem
ination and preservation of scientific knowledge and its underlying philosoph
ical concepts both after 500/1107 and outside the sphere of Arabic.

A major field of courtly patronage was the copying and illustrating of scientific treatises in courtly kitabkhanes or karkhanes, workshops for the arts

27 See MS Paris, BNF, Supplement Persan 1838, Appendix.

28 Abu 1 'Abbas Ahmad ibn 'All al Qalqashandl, Subh al a'shafi sina'at al insha', 14 vols.
(Cairo, 1331 8/1913 20), vol. VI, pp. 168 70.

29 Ibn Khallikan, Wafayat al a'yan wa anha' abna' al zaman, 8 vols. (Beirut, n.d.); Shams
al Din al Sakhawi, al Daw' al lami' li ahl al qarn al tasi\ 10 vols. (Beirut, n.d.).

30 Ziva Vesel, 'La science a la cour: Les questions et les responses', in C. Balay, C. Kappler

and Z. Vesel (eds.), Pand Sokhan: Melanges offerts a Charles Henri de Foueheour (Tehran,
1995).

of the book. Almost no illustrated scientific manuscripts in Arabic or Persian
survive from earlier than the sixth/twelfth century. But there is evidence that
this process started in the fourth/ tenth century, if not earlier. The iconogra
phy of the extant illustrated scientific manuscripts points to cross cultural
artistic exchange with Byzantium, Egypt, Khurasan, Sogdiana, Balkh, China,
non Muslim India and the nomadic steppes of Eurasia. With the exception of
later courts in North Africa, dynasties in apparently all major cultural areas of
the core Islamic territories contributed in this way to the spread and main
tenance of scientific literature.

The connection between the arts and the sciences was not limited to the
occult and the popular such as magical bowls or illustrations of the miracu
lous. Neither was it stereotypical and conventional. Scientific works profited
from the innovative changes in the arts that took place under various Islamic
and non Islamic dynasties, from new views about which scholarly disciplines
should be sponsored by princely and other courtly patrons and from an
opening of disciplines to artistic illustration that previously had pursued rather
austere modes of the visual. Examples include translations of Chinese medical
and agricultural writings at the Ilkhanid court under the patronage of the

vizier Rashid al Dawla (d. 718/1318) and the Mongol military and diplomatic
counsellor at the Ilkhanid court, Bolad Ch'engHsiang (d. 713/1313), or the
illustration of Qutb al Din al Shtrazf s (d. 710/1311) theoretical work on planet
ary movements al Tuhfa al shahiyya (The royal gift) in the style of one of the
leading painters of the Safavid court, Reza Abbasl(d. 1045/1635). 31 The literary,
religious and scientific anthologies of the Timurid prince of Shiraz and Isfahan
Iskandar Sultan (r. 812 17/1409 14) represent another example of the relation
ship between science and art. The scientific texts in these anthologies are illustrated by carefully constructed diagrams, colourful images of zodiacal
signs, planetary houses and related subjects as well as a beautifully drawn
map. A number of them are inscribed on the margins, thus serving themselves

31 Thomas T. Allsen, 'Biography of a cultural broker: Bolad Ch'eng Hsiang in China and
Iran', in Julian Raby and Teresa Fitzherbert (eds.), The court of the R Khans 1290 1340
(Oxford, New York and Toronto, 1994); Nasrollah Pourjavady (gen. ed.), The
splendour of Iran, 3 vols. (London, 2001), vol. Ill: C. Parham (ed.), Islamic period,
pp. 282 7; Thomas W. Lentz and Glenn D. Lowry (eds.), Timur and the princely vision:
Persian art and culture in the fifteenth century (Los Angeles, 1989), pp. 57 8, 79 103, 108 39;
Zeren Akalay [Tanindi], An illustrated astrological work of the period of Iskandar
Sultan', in Akten des VII. Internationalen Kongresses fir Iranische Kunst und Archaologie
(Munich, 1976), Archaologische Mitteilungen aus Iran, n.s., supplementary vol. (Berlin,
1979), PP- 418 25; Priscilla P. Soucek, "The manuscripts of Iskandar Sultan', in Lisa
Golombek and Maria Subtelny (eds.), Timurid art and culture: Iran and Central Asia in
the fifteenth century (Leiden, New York and Cologne, 1992).

The sciences in Islamic societies

as decorations. The only known miniature of astronomers studying and
observing the sky in a domed building, dated before the late tenth
/sixteenth
century, comes from one of these manuscripts.

The evolution of the Sunni madrasa in Iran, Anatolia, Syria, Iraq, Egypt
and North Africa created a new outlet for court patronage. Caliphs,
sultans,
atabegs, royal wives and daughters, officers, merchants and scholars
engaged
in funding madrasas, Sufi convents, hospitals, houses for the study
ofhadith
and the Qur'an and tombs. The ancient sciences also benefited from
these
donations. 'Abbasid caliphs funded chairs for medicine in prominent
madra
sas. Ilkhanid Buddhist and Muslim rulers sponsored the observatories of
Maragha and Tabriz. They kept a travelling madrasa in their camps,
where
scholars taught literature, religion, philosophy and mathematical
sciences.
Mamluk sultans sponsored a chair for Him al rniqat (science of
timekeeping),
appointed muwaqqits as professors offiqh and heads of Sufi convents,
opened
medical madrasas and donated chairs for medicine at central mosques in
Cairo. Ottoman, Safavid and Mughal rulers likewise provided for other
than
religious and legal teaching at the madrasas they gifted with funds. The
impact of rulers, wives and court officials remained mostly limited to
funding, the creation of positions, the appointment of professors and the
settling of power struggles among the Hilama\ They rarely interfered in
the
subjects taught at the madrasas, mosques and other teaching institutes.
Neither did they set up administrative bodies that unified the teaching
and
controlled its results, with the exception of medicine. The Mamluks, for

instance, entrusted the control of medical qualification to the head physician,
who was attached to the court. The Mansuriyya madrasa in Cairo and its
affiliated hospital was governed by a diwan specifically created for this
purpose. 32

A third strand of patronage came from individuals who invested their own
funds and labour. Marginalia and colophons in numerous extant manuscripts
testify that they were copied and even illuminated by practitioners of one of
the sciences or scientific professions. Physicians and students of medicine not
only copied medical textbooks and astrological treatises, but were responsible
for attractively illustrated copies of Zakariyya 3 al QazwTnf s work, Euclid's
Elements and astronomical texts. Such activities indicate that Ibn Jumay''s
demand that physicians should study Him al hay'a (mathematical cosmology),
not Him al nujiim (astrology) in order to become truly scientific experts of the
art of medicine was not a mere topos of complaint, but was derived from

32 al Qalqashandi, Subh, vol. VI, pp. 34, 38 9.

577

competing scientific practices. 33 Students of astronomical and astrological
knowledge also copied treatises from related mathematical sciences such as
arithmetic or algebra. The contribution of private sponsorship to the produc
tion, reproduction and distribution of scientific manuscripts and objects has
not yet received much attention.

Innovation in the mathematical sciences

The concepts of what the mathematical sciences were, the tools with which
they should work, the purposes they should fulfil and the names that were
thought appropriate for them differed substantially over time, space and
culture. In part, divergent pre Islamic traditions lay behind the differences.
Not only did Indian perceptions differ from those of classical Greece, those of
classical Greece differed from those of Byzantine Late Antiquity, those of
ancient Mesopotamia from those of ancient Egypt and those of Seleucid Iraq
from those of Sasanian Iran, but there was more than one school of mathe
matics taught in Byzantine Late Antiquity. There was also more than one local
tradition by which tax collectors, merchants and constructors calculated their
gains, the labourers' wages and the necessary hours of work and measured or
weighed the harvest, the commodities, the building blocks and the fields.
Hence, in the first centuries of Islam not only did a multitude of peoples,
religions and lifestyles come together under a new central government with a
different creed and concept of leadership, but the empire did not and could not
operate with uniform standards of calculating, measuring, weighing, solving
mathematical problems and proofs.

Our knowledge about the local mathematical practices during these early
centuries is not very good. Egyptian papyri of the second/ eighth century were
long believed to contain the first record of Indian numerals in an Arabic
document. But this reading has been contested. 34 The Qur'an indicates that
inheritance shares were determined before Muhammad recited the verses
with the new quota, but we don't know which mathematical rules were used
for calculating the shares in a concrete case. 35 When Muhammad ibn Musa
al Khwarizmi wrote the first surviving Arabic handbook on algebra, which

33 Fahndrich (ed.), Ibnjumay\ pp. 2, 16.

34 Paul Kunitzsch, 'The transmission of Hindu Arabic numerals reconsidered', in Jan
P. Hogendijk and Abdelhamid I. Sabra (eds.), The enterprise of science in Islam: New
perspectives (Cambridge, MA, and London, 2003).

35 The Koran Interpreted: A translation, trans. A.J. Arberry, 2 vols. (New York, 1996), vol. I,
sura 4: Women, pp. 100 2.

578

The sciences in Islamic societies

also contained chapters on surveying, commercial transactions and inheri
tance mathematics (fara'id), he presented the rules according to Abu Hamfa
(d. 150/767) in a fairly formalised manner. By doing so he may even have
contributed to the process of standardising Abu Hamfa's teaching. Moreover,
Muhammad al Khwarizmi used pre Islamic methods of geometrical arguing
as well as proofs that were developed by Babylonian and Seleucid scribes. 36
Another Arabic text on algebra written by Ayyub al Basri may contain even
earlier Islamic mathematical knowledge and techniques than al Khwarizmi' s
work. 37

While we know very little about mathematics until the fall of the
Umayyads, it is clear that a new level of mathematical interest and sophisti
cation was reached under the early 'Abbasids. Arabic historical sources
reported that the second Abbasid caliph, al Mansur, sent to Byzantium for a
manuscript of Euclid's Elements. The manuscripts acquired as booty or tribute

during the many clashes with Byzantine armies probably contained other texts
by Euclid such as the Data and by other Greek scholars. A small but steady
stream of translations of mathematical texts was produced during the first fifty
years of 'Abbasid rule, sponsored by the caliphs, their viziers, commanders
and administrators. Yahya ibn Khalid al Barmaki, for instance, was patron of
the translation of Euclid's Elements and Ptolemy's Almagest. The Nestorian
metropolitan Habib ibn Bahriz translated the Introduction to arithmetic, written
by the Neopythagorean philosopher Nicomachus of Gerasa (second century
CE), for the caliph al Ma'mun's general Tahir ibn Husayn. Al Kind! gave
seminars on this newly translated text. 38 The political, philosophical, religious
and cultural differences between al Kindi and the Banu Musa included
divergent views on mathematics. While al Kind! favoured Neoplatonic,
Neopythagorean and hermetic texts and themes, the use of mathematical
concepts and tools for proving major philosophical and religious tenets (the
existence of God; creatio ex nihilo; the finiteness of the universe) as well as the
application of Greek number theory to recreational mathematics of mixed
origins (Mesopotamia, India, China), the Banu Musa supported the translation

36 Jens Hoyrup, 'al Khwarizmi, Ibn Turk, and the Liber mensurationum: On the origins of
Islamic algebra', Erdem, 5 (1986).

37 Barnabas Hughes, 'Problem solving by Ajjub al Basri, an early algebraist', Journal for the
History of Arabic Science, 10 (1992 4).

38 Gad Freudenthal and Tony Levy, 'De Gerase a Bagdad: Ibn Bahriz, al Kindi, et leur
recension arabe de {'Introduction arithmetique de Nicomaque, d'apres la version
hebraique de Qalonymos ben Qalonymos d' Aries', in Regis Morelon and Ahmad
Hasnawi (eds.), De Zenon d'Elee a Poincare: Recueil d'etudes en homage a Roshdi Rashed
(Louvain and Paris, 2004).

579

The New Cambridge History of Islam

of Apollonius' Conies, favoured the creation of new mathematical results over
the memorising of mathematical textbooks and recommended the study of
Archimedean books and tools. 39 They agreed, on the other hand, in applying
Greek theoretical mathematics to practical problems; and they studied not
only Greek mathematical theory, but practice too, as much as it was codified
in textual form. The fields of application comprised surveying, sundials,
optics, burning mirrors, mechanics and medicine. The contribution of these
groups of courtly patrons, scholars and translators to the development of a
mathematical terminology in Arabic, the pursuit of different approaches to
mathematics, the emergence of highly skilled and innovative mathematicians
in the later third/ninth and throughout the fourth/tenth centuries and the
spread of acceptance of mathematics as a well reputed set of disciplines and
methods for finding truth among different groups of educated Muslims and
members of the religious minorities cannot be overrated.

The relationship between algebra and arithmetic was shaped by the impact
of the translations of Nicomachus' Introduction to arithmetic, books VII IX of
Euclid's Elements and Diophantus' Arithmetic, on the one hand, and of the
various local traditions of calculation for purposes of business, inheritance and
surveying, on the other. The Neoplatonic and Neopythagorean classifications

of the mathematical sciences identified arithmetic as number theory, ignored calculation, interpreted numbers and their properties as carriers of philosoph ical and religious meaning and ranked arithmetic above geometry, astronomy and theoretical music (theory of proportions). This approach was propagated by al Kindi in the first half of the third / ninth century and by Thabit ibn Qurra in the second. Fragments of an Arabic edition of Euclid's Elements indicate that it was also applied to interpreting book II and certain theorems in books I, III and VI of the Elements, which did not belong to number theory as taught in the framework of this work. It became the position taken by the author(s) of the RasaHl Ikhwan al Safa\ Ibn STna in his Kitab al shifa' (The book of healing) and other writers of encyclopaedic works of the fourth/tenth and fifth /eleventh centuries. While the philosophical attitudes of such writers may explain their preferences in number theory certain parts of Nicomachus' teaching were also privileged by writers who came from a different milieu fuqaha' and mutakallimiin such as Abu Mansur Abd al Qahir ibn Tahir al Nisaburi al Baghdad! (d. 428/1037). Numerous later writers from this milieu such as Isma'il ibn Ibrahim ibn al Fallus (d. 637/1239), Abu '1 'Abbas Ahmad ibn Muhammad ibn al Banna' al Marrakushi (d. 721/1321) or Shihab al Din ibn

39 Ibn al Nadim, Fihrist, trans. Dodge, vol. II, pp. 637 8.

580

The sciences in Islamic societies

al Majdi (d. 851/1447) continued along this line and taught this kind of number
theory in their classes at madrasas, mosques and khanqahs. In contrast to Greek
traditions, algebra, number theory and calculation became classified in Arabic,
Persian and Turkish treatises as parts of a comprehensive Hhn al hisab (the
science of calculation), in which number theoretical knowledge in the
Nicomachean tradition kept its position at the highest rank.

Muhammad al Khwarizmi's books on algebra and Indian arithmetic
had a significant impact on several scholarly milieus. When Qusta ibn Luqa
(d. c. 297/910) translated Diophantus' Arithmetic in the second half of the third/
ninth century, he interpreted its contents according to the technical terminol
ogy of al Khwarizmi's algebra. 40 Diophantine problems came to be seen as
belonging to both algebra and arithmetic. The extension and reshaping of
algebra by Abu Bakr al Karaji (d. c. 420/1029) and al Samaw'al ibn Yahya
al Maghrib! (d. 570/1175) is shown by their treatment of algebraic themes with
arithmetical concepts and methods. They extended the earlier limited concept
of unknowns of higher than second order (x^3 ... x^9) to unknowns of finite but
unlimited order, and applied this new view also to parts', i.e. fractions of the
type i/x^n. These new objects became the focus of the new approach to
algebra, above all the solution of polynomial equations of second and higher
degree, as well as the development of a calculus for such equations. 41 As a
result of these developments algebraic methods came to be seen as tools that
also could be used in other mathematical areas. Several scholars such as Ibn
Mun'im (sixth seventh/twelfth thirteenth centuries) or Kamal al Din al Farisi
(d. 718/1318?) applied them to problems of combinatorics and found new
methods or proofs for a number of theoretical problems such as the calcu
lation of perfect or amicable numbers. A perfect number is a number the sum
of whose parts equals the number such as $6 = 1 + 2 + 3$. Amicable numbers are
a pair of numbers where the sum of the parts of one number equals the other

number such as 220 = 1 + 2 + 4 + 5 + 10 + 11 + 20 + 22 + 44 + 55 + no = 284,
284 = 1 + 2 + 4 + 72 + 142 = 220. 42

40 Jacques Sesiano, Books IV to VII of Diophantus' Arithmetical In the Arabic translation
attributed to Qusta ibn Luqa (New York and Berlin, 1982).

41 Roshdi Rashed, Entre arithmetique et algebre: Recherches sur VMstoire ties mathematiques
arabes (Paris, 1984); Roshdi Rashed, Tfie development of Arabic mathematics: Between
arithmetic and algebra (London, 1994).

42 Ahmed Djebbar, L'analyse combinatoire au Maghreb: I'Exemple d'Ibn Mun'im (Xlle XMe
siecles), Publications Mathematiques d'Orsay 85 01 (Paris, 1985); Roshdi Rashed,
'Materials for the study of the history of amicable numbers and combinatorial analysis',

Journal for the History of Arabic Science, 6,12 (1982); Roshdi Rashed, 'Nombres amiables,
parties aliquotes et nombres figures aux Xllleme et XlVeme siecles', Archive for History
of Exact Sciences, 28, 2 (1983).

The New Cambridge History of Islam

The relationships between these two disciplines and geometry were similarly complex. Scholars such as Thabit ibn Qurra, Abu Abd Allah Muhammad ibn [Isa al Mahani (d. c. 246/860), Thabit' s grandson Ibrahim ibn
Sinan (d. 335/946) and Abu All al Hasan Ibn al Haytham (d. c. 432/1041) used
number theory or algebra when dealing with geometrical problems such as the

determination of the surface of a parabola and the volume of bodies of
rotation or the discussion of an unproven lemma by Archimedes. 43
Thabit
ibn Qurra also demonstrated that two theorems of book II of Euclid's
Elements were a more rigorous tool for proofs than al Khwarizmi's own
geometrical reasoning. 44 Despite his major contribution to the new
algebra,
Abu Bakr al Karaji believed that geometry was of a higher scientific value
because of its demonstrative rigour and axiomatic structure.

Other scholars such as Abuja'far al Khazin (d. between 349 and 360/961
and
971), Abu 'ljud ibn Layth (fourth/tenth century), Ahmad ibn Muhammad
al Sijzi (d. c. 410/1020) and 'Umar al Khayyam (d. 517/1123) pursued an
oppo
site approach and used Apollonius' Conies for tackling problems that led
to
cubic and bi quadratic equations. Several of these problems originated in
a
geometrical context, such as the debate about how to inscribe a regular
heptagon into a circle. This and related problems came from discussions
of
works of Archimedes and classical mathematical problems such as the
trisec
tion of an angle, as well as certain mathematical tools that had already
caused
lively debates among ancient geometers such as the use of movements in
geometrical constructions, for instance the device called neusis (verging
construction). 45

Due to the diversification of courts, patronage and cultural centres the
fourth/tenth century saw a particularly productive and widespread
discussion
carried on by mathematicians, mainly in greater Iran, through the
exchange of
personal letters, evening discussions, competitive questioning and proud
occasionally even boastful reports about apparently or truly successful
new
ideas and solutions. As a result, several treatises on constructing the side
of

43 Ahmad Salim Sa'idan, RasaHl Ibn Sinan (Kuwait, 1983).

44 Paul Luckey, 'Thabit b. Qurra iiber den geometrischen
Richtigkeitsnachweis der
Auflosung der quadratischen Gleichungen', in Berichte iiber die
Verhandlungen der

Sachsischen Akademie der Wissenschaften zu Leipzig, Mathematisch physikalische Klasse
93 (Heidelberg, 1941).

45 Ahmet Djebbar and Roshdi Rashed (eds., trans, and comm.), L'oeuvre algebrique d'al
Khayyam (Aleppo, 1981), p. 11; Jan P. Hogendijk, 'How trisections of the angle were
transmitted from Greek to Islamic geometry', Historia Mathematiea, 8 (1981); Jan
P. Hogendijk, 'Greek and Arabic constructions of the regular heptagon', Archive for
History of Exact Sciences, 30 (1984); Jan P. Hogendijk, 'The geometrical works of Abu
Sa'Id al Darir aljurjam, SCIAMVS, 2 (2001).

a regular heptagon, trisecting the angle and related problems were written and
a systematic geometrical theory for solving cubic equations was established. 46
Besides these cross disciplinary works and debates, much innovative work
was done within the classical disciplines. The ancient methods of analysis and
synthesis were at the centre of mathematical research and discussion. Several
scholars of the third/ninth, fourth/tenth and fifth/ eleventh centuries wrote
manuals about these two methods, among them Ibrahim ibn Sinan and Ibn
al Haytham. Others, such as al Sijzi and Abu Sahl WTjan ibn Rustam al Kuhl
(fourth/tenth century), compiled collections of problems for which they
proposed various kinds of synthesis and analysis. Their texts make clear that
different opinions were held about how to work with these two methods, and

disputes arose over violations of mathematical rigour. 47 The problems treated
in these and related works were either derived from texts of ancient Greek
authors or devised in a similar way. The works used in this context were in
particular Euclid's Data, Division of figures and Porisms, Apollonius' Conies,
Cutting ojfa ratio, Plane loci and Determinate section, Menelaus' Introduction to
geometry and Archimedes' Sphere and cylinder, Measuring the circle and the
spurious work on the heptagon. 48 The extant writings by al Sijzi, Abu 'ljud
and others indicate that these problems, the two methods (analysis and syn
thesis) and their results were studied, debated and challenged in the milieu of
the private evening majlis, publicly shared letters and publicly held disputes
as is documented, for instance, in the treatise Jawab Ahmad b. Muhammad
b. c Abd aljalil li as'ila handasiyya su'ila l anha bi 'I nas min Khurasan (Reply by
Ahmad ibn Muhammad ibn 'Abd aljalil to geometrical questions asked by
people from Khurasan). 49 Al Sijzi placed the art of finding new results in
geometry in an epistemological context. He opposed the claim that 'discovery

46 Jan P. Hogendijk, 'Abu 1 Jud's answer to a question of al Biruni concerning the regular
heptagon', in D. A. King and G. Saliba (eds.), From deferent to equant: A volume of studies in
the ancient and medieval Near East in honor ofE. S. Kennedy (New York, 1987).

47 J. Lennart Berggren and Glen van Brummelen, 'The role and development of geometric
analysis and synthesis in ancient Greece and medieval Islam', in Patrick Suppes, Julius
M. Moravcsik and Henry Mendell (eds.), Ancient and medieval traditions in tfie exact
sciences: Essays in memory of Wilbur Knorr (Stanford, 2001).

48 See, for instance, Jan P. Hogendijk, Arabic traces of lost works of Apollonius', Archive
for History of Exact Sciences, 35 (1986); Jan P. Hogendijk, 'On Euclid's lost Porisms and its

Arabic traces', Bolletino di Storia delle Science Matematiche, 7 (1988); Jan P. Hogendijk,
'The Arabic version of Euclid's On division', in M. Folkerts and J. P. Hogendijk (eds.),
Vestigia Mathematica: Studies in medieval and early modern mathematics in honour of
H. L. L. Busard (Amsterdam, 1993); J. L. Berggren, J. P. Hogendijk, The fragments of Abu
Sahl alKuhi's lost geometrical works in the writings of al Sijzi (University of Utrecht,
Department of Mathematics, Preprint no. 1226, February 2002), pp. 4 18.

49 See Fuat Sezgin, Geschichte des arabischen Schrifttums, 12 vols. (Leiden, 1974), vol. V,
p. 333, no. 22.

583

The New Cambridge History of Islam

in geometry proceeds only by means of innate ability and not by study'. 50 He
then proceeded to enlist and discuss seven rules to find new results, mostly
constructions. These rules included knowledge of the conditions of a problem;
knowledge of common features and differences of a set of problems; mastery
of the relevant theorems and preliminaries; familiarity with tricks used by
experienced mathematicians; and specific mathematical methods (analysis,
transformation) . 5I

In a similar way, the branches of optics and mechanics, which ancient Greek
scholars had mostly seen as parts of geometry, were modified, enlarged and in
some of their parts revolutionised. Optics, for instance, merged the various

strands of ancient mathematical, philosophical and medical theories about
vision into a coherent whole that added the study of light to that of sight and
also included parts of astronomy and surveying. On the methodological side,
it abandoned the ancient preference for geometrical demonstrative theory and
made room for experiments, practical concerns and technical constructions. 52.
During the third/ninth and fourth/tenth centuries, optical themes were
discussed in four main intellectual contexts: geometry (vision through air,
vision through mediums other than air, burning mirrors and lenses); philo
sophy (theories of light and perception, meteorology); astronomy (shadows,
perception, visual errors); and medicine (anatomy and physiology of the eye).
A decisive step towards a new disciplinary understanding took place in the
fifth/ eleventh century with the work of Ibn al Haytham, who aimed at
combining the mathematical and physical aspects of vision, moved the focus
of the discipline towards light and integrated into his approach topics from
Ptolemy's Optics such as refraction. Ibn al Haytham's most important work on
optics is his Kitab al manazir (Book of optics), which gives an experimental and
mathematical treatment of the properties of light and colour in relationship to
vision. 53 A summary of its arguments and a fuller presentation of his exper
imental results is the Maqala fi I daw 1 (Treatise on light). 54 He differentiated

50 Al Sijzl, Treatise on geometrical problem solving: Kitab fi tashil al subul li istikhraj al ashkal
al handasiya, ed., trans, and comm. Jan P. Hogendijk, Arabic text and a Persian trans.
Mohammad Bagheri (Tehran, 1996), p. 2.

51 Ibid., pp. x xiii.

52 Elaheh Kheirandish, 'Optics: Highlights from Islamic lands', in Ahmad Y. al Hassan,

Maqbul Ahmed and Ahmad Z. Iskandar (eds.), The different aspects of Islamic culture,
vol. IV: Science and technology in Islam, part 1, The exact and natural sciences ([Paris], 2001),
pp. 337 8, 345; Abdelhamid I. Sabra, The optics of Ibn al Haytham, books 1 3, book 2: On
direct vision (with introduction, commentary, glossaries, concordance, indices) (London,
1989).

53 Sabra, On direct vision, p. lv.

54 Ibid., p. li, fn 73.

The sciences in Islamic societies

between the approach of the natural philosopher, who studies the mahiyya
(quiddity) of light, transparency or the ray, and that of the mathematician,
who deals with the kayfiyya ('howness') of the ray's extension in transparent
bodies and the shapes of rays.

Natural philosophers and mathematicians also differed in their basic belief
about what light is. Ibn al Haytham set out to synthesise the two different
disciplinary programmes, and did so by experimenting with 'dark chambers'
and by criticising theories, methods and concepts of previous scholars of both
approaches. Through experiments he discovered that the Euclidean theory of
vision (visual rays extend from the eye to the object) was wrong. Through
his critical analysis of previous writings he observed that the natural philoso
phers and physicians, who correctly believed that vision took place by a
form (light) that emerged from a shining object and was received by the eye,

had no precise doctrine of the ray. 55 Following on from this, he applied the
methods of the mathematicians to the doctrines of the natural philosophers
and physicians. 56 He introduced new categories such as 'primary light' and
'secondary light', and posed new questions. Primary light is light that issues
from self luminous bodies. Secondary light is light that emanates from acci
dental light, i.e. light existing in bodies illuminated from the outside. One of
Ibn al Haytham's new questions was: if vision resulted from the imprint of a
form onto the eye, why does one see the object outside the eye? 57

But while revolutionising the science of optics in many ways, Ibn
al Haytham's Kitab al manazir did not discuss all optical themes he had
treated in previous writings and other disciplinary settings. 58 The major
breakthrough in respect to a new disciplinary understanding of optics came
with Kama! al Din al Farisfs Tanqih al manazir li dhawl al absar wa 'I bascCir
(Revision of [The book of] optics for the possessors of insight and discern
ment), a commentary on Ibn al Haytham's opus. He added three further
treatises by Ibn al Haytham on shadows, perception and light together with
his own analysis and exposition of the subjects. Kama! al Din justified this
collection by claiming these subjects as part of the science of optics. Except
for burning mirrors, Kama! al Din considered all other previously discon
nected strands that dealt with themes related to light and vision as constitu
ting optics.

55 Ibid., p. liii.

56 Ibid., pp. liv lv.

57 Ibid., pp. lii, liv.
58 Ibid., p. liii.

59 Kheirandish, 'Optics', p. 349.

A similar process took place with regard to the ancient domains of statics,
hydrostatics, dynamics and weights discussed in the contexts of geometry,
medicine, natural philosophy and technology. Various works by or ascribed
to Aristotle, Euclid, Apollonius, Archimedes, Heron, Pappus and Galen
were translated into Arabic during the third/ninth century and taken up
in a process that reshaped the various disciplines. The major figures who
contributed to this process were the Banu Musa, Qusta ibn Luqa, Thabit ibn
Qurra, Abu Nasr al Farabi (d. 340/950), WTjan al Kuhi, Ibn al Haytham, Ibn
Srna, al Karaji, Abu Hatim al Muzaffar ibn Isma'il al Isfizari (d. c. 504/1110),
'Umar al Khayyam, Abd al Rahman al Khazini (d. after 515/1121) and Ibn
Isma'il ibn al Razzaz aljazari (fl. c. 603/1206). The result of this process was
twofold. On one hand, al Farabi, in his Ihsa 1 al Hdum (Enumeration of the
sciences), testified to and justified philosophically the evolution of two
separate mathematical disciplines of mechanics: Him al aihqal (the science
of weights) and Him al hiyal (the science of machines). Neither of the two
new disciplines unified all relevant ancient strands. The first focused on a
relatively small range of subjects (the theory of the balance and practical
problems of weighing). ° Its conceptual core is the investigation and explan
ation of mechanical questions through motion and force. The inspiration for
this approach stems from the Pseudo Aristotelian Problemata mechanica. As
a result, the new discipline was closely linked to natural philosophy, on the
one hand, and to medical and commercial practices of weighing, on the
other. The study of the centres of gravity of surfaces and solids was seen
by al Kuhi, al Isfizari and al Khazini as the theoretical nucleus of this new
discipline, which is a new point of view when compared to Thabit ibn
Qurra's Kitab al qarastun, which mainly dealt with the law of the lever for
material beams and balances. The second new discipline also may be
considered as formed by two different domains. One domain was part of
natural philosophy and dealt with the so called five simple machines of

Antiquity (the windlass, the lever, the pulley, the wedge and the screw). It
studied, as al Farabi explained, the ways in which mathematical knowledge
could be brought from quwwa (potentiality) to fi c l (actuality) by applying it
to natural bodies by means of machines. : The other shared the mathematical methodology, but dealt with practical machines for time measuring, water lifting, entertainment, healing and other purposes.

60 Mohammed Abattouy, The Arabic tradition of the science of weights and balances: A report
on an ongoing research project (Max Planck Institute for the History of Science, Preprint
227, 2002), pp. 7 11, 13.

61 Al Farabi, Ihsa' al 'ulum, ed. 'Uthman Amin, 2nd edn (Cairo, 1949), pp. 88 9.

586

The sciences in Islamic societies

The enormous attraction exercised by the axiomatic, deductive structure of
geometry can be seen in al Karaji's treatise on water lifting, which is written in
the style of Euclid's Elements. Al Jazari, in his monumental book on machines,
which he composed at the Artuqid court of Diyarbakr, also considered what
he did as an application of geometry to machines, which he understood as a
philosophical act. 2 Inthe title of his book aljdtnf bayna I Hbnwa'l L amalal nap.'
fi sina'at al hiyal (The combination of theory and practice in the mechanical
arts) al Jazari formulated a second purpose, namely to bring together Him
(knowledge) and 'atrial nafC (useful practice). 63 This aim refers on one level to

theory and practice in a scientific context. On another level the chosen title has
a religious subtext. Every Muslim was called to acquire Him and exercise it
through 'amal in order to do things useful for the community. Al Ghazall made this point repeatedly in his influential writings when he discussed the
sciences as well as the duties of a Muslim. The praise for the usefulness of
books written by scholars of all disciplines, expressed time and again in the
biographical dictionaries, underlines the social relevance of these terms for the
scholarly world in medieval Islamic societies.

Innovations were not restricted to those disciplines that were already established before the advent of Islam. From the third/ninth century onwards
mathematicians and astronomers created new mathematical branches by either building upon certain components inherited from Greek and Indian predecessors or by inventing completely new fields of mathematical knowl
edge. Such new branches often did not receive a specific name, or if they did
the names do not fit into modern divisions of mathematics. Examples are trigonometry, magic squares, combinatorics, multi entry astronomical tables
with auxiliary functions and the use of mathematics in philosophy and kalam.
While many of the above mentioned innovations developed within the context of the appropriated ancient sciences, the newly emerging fields of
knowledge also had strong connections with particular needs and interests of
Islamic societies, their religions, languages and everyday life. Combinatorics
first appeared in the work of the Arabic grammarian KhalU ibn Ahmad (d. 170/
786?) as he tried to arrange the three and four consonants of Arabic roots for a

62 al Jazari, Tfte book of knowledge of ingenious mechanical devices: Kitab fima'rifat al hiyal al
handasiyya, trans. Donald R. Hill with annotations (Dordrecht, London and New York,
1973)- For a critique of Hill's interpretation of al Jazari' s work and title see George Saliba,

'The function of mechanical devices in medieval Islamic society', in P. Long (ed.),
Science and technology in medieval society, Annals of the New York Academy of Sciences
441 (New York, 1985).

63 al Jazari, aljami' bayna I 'Urn wa'l 'amal al nafi' fisina'at al hiyal, ed. Ahmad Y. al Hassan
(Aleppo, 1979).

The New Cambridge History of Islam

dictionary. Magic squares and their development were part of the search for
licit methods of protecting oneself from misfortune, disease and death and
determining the best approaches to travelling, marriage, house building and
other undertakings. 64 Mathematical themes and methods as applied in philo
sophy and kalam were used for arguing about what separated tawhid, the
specific Muslim notion of the oneness of God, from other forms of oneness as
well as from multitude, for proving God's existence and for discussion about
the material structure of the universe and its regularities, i.e. about atomism,
continuity, infinity and causality. The most frequently borrowed mathemat
ical themes in such contexts came from Euclid's Elements and from
Nicomachus's Introduction to arithmetic, for instance the definition of one as
the beginning and the root of integers, but no number itself; the question of
whether the area between an arc and a tangent to one of its points was a
geometrical quantity, i.e. a plane angle in the Euclidean sense; whether the
ratio between the circumference and the diagonal of a circle was a rational

number; and whether motion was a permissible geometrical concept.

From the beginning algebra and Indian arithmetic were deeply linked to the needs and interests of an Islamic society. Muhammad al Khwarizmi had
argued for the relevance of these two fields by pointing in clear terms to merchants, surveyors and jurists as the three major groups in society who
were in need of them. By applying his methods to positions and prescriptions
taken from the not yet fully codified teachings of Abu Hanifa rather than from
the Qur'an, or in general from all legal schools that were emerging during the
second/eighth and early third/ninth centuries, al Khwarizmi made a clear point about the truly practical orientation of the two new fields in contrast to a
merely illustrative function of potential fields of application for mathematical
knowledge. When comparing the impact different treatises on algebra and
Indian arithmetic had in later Arabic, Persian and Ottoman Turkish writings
about commercial and legal calculations as composed and taught in the context of the madrasa, al Khwarizmi's al Kitab al mukhtasarfi hisab aljabr wa
'I muqabala (Abbreviated book on algebra) without doubt was the most successful one. Its elementary mathematical content, the visual accessibility

64 See Jacques Sesiano, Un traite medieval sur les carres magiques: De V 'arrangement harmo
nieux des nombres (Lausanne, 1996); Jacques Sesiano, 'Herstellungsverfahren magischer
Quadrate aus islamischerZeit', (I, II, II', III) Sudhoffs Archiv, 64 (1980), 65 (1981), 71 (1987),
79 (1995); Jacques Sesiano, 'Une compilation arabe du Xlle siecle sur quelques proprietes
des nombres naturels', SCIAMVS, 4 (2003); Francis Maddison and Emilie Savage Smith,
Science, tools and magic, part 1: Body and spirit: Mapping the universe, Nasser D. Khalili
Collection of Islamic Art 12 (London, 1997).

of its arguments and its practical relevance may all have contributed to this
preference given to al Khwarizmi's work over those by Abu Kamil al Misri
(d. c. 235/850), al Karaji or al Samaw'al.

The Islamic aspects of cosmology, astronomy and astrology

Throughout the history of Islamic civilisation, as had been the case in the
ancient world, astronomy was a sophisticated science that enjoyed much
prestige. Astronomy, though at first closely connected to astrology, became,
by the fourth/tenth century (or possibly the third/ninth), a more purely
theoretical science of the heavens. 65 This increased distance between astron
omy and astrology affected both fields, so this chapter places important
developments in astronomy within the context of its relationship to astrology
and to other applications and areas of religious scholarship.

The decision about whether to describe the astronomy and astrology of
this chapter as 'Islamic' or as 'Arabic' deserves explanation. The appellation
Arabic science' calls attention to the language in which many, but not all,
important scientific texts were written. Arabic, too, remains the most impor
tant (but not the only) language of Islamic scholarship. The term 'Islamic
science' recalls the dominant religion of the science's broader context, but the
participation of non Muslims in this science begs the question of the centrality
of Islam to Islamic science. One leading journal in the field, Zeitschrift fur
Geschichte der Arabisch Islamischen Wissenschaften, acknowledges both terms.
Because users of this book are more likely to be students of Islamic civilisation
than historians of science I have emphasised the intellectual and social
contexts of astronomy and astrology in Islamic civilisation over the technical

details.

Origins

The pre Islamic Arabs had a folk astronomy based on omens, but not lunar
mansions, and perhaps a lunar calendar that they intercalated to keep pace
with the solar year. 67 Isolated translations of scientific texts from Greek into

65 George Saliba, 'Astronomy and astrology in medieval Arabic thought', in Roshdi
Rashed and Joel Biard (eds.), Les doctrines de la science de Vantiquite a Vdge classique
(Leuven, 1999), pp. 137, 163.

66 Ahmad Dallal, 'Science, medicine, and technology', in John L. Esposito (ed.), The Oxford
history of Islam (Oxford and New York, 1999), p. 158.

67 Daniel M. Varisco, 'The origin of the anwa' in Arab tradition', SI, 64 (1991).

589

The New Cambridge History of Islam

Syriac and Pahlavi occurred in more settled regions of the pre Islamic Near
East. But the explosion of scientific activity during the 'Abbasid caliphate was
neither coincidental nor simply a continuation of translation activities in the
pre Islamic Near East. Social, economic and political conditions in the
'Abbasid caliphate, and in the earlier Umayyad caliphate, created a demand
for top notch scholars and translators. The Umayyads had initially preserved
the pre existing administrative apparatus of the lands they conquered. Then

the caliph [Abd al Malik (d. 86/705), or perhaps Hisham (d. 125/743), decided
to translate the administrative records of the caliphate into Arabic, which led
to an influx of Arab administrators, ministers who were not proficient in
Greek or Persian. 69 Information about administrative activities, such as sur
veying and calendar calculation, would also have to be in Arabic for the benefit
of these Arab ministers and scribes. Such practical considerations are one of
the reasons why the Islamic empire would pay attention to the heritage of the
civilisations that it vanquished. The 'Abbasid caliphs, after coming to power in
132/750, saw an additional value in the translation of scientific texts. One factor
that brought the Abbasids to power was solidarity among Iranian converts to
Islam. Translation, then, lent political prestige to the 'Abbasids by fostering a
link to the Sasanian empire and thus to its real and mythical contacts with
the rest of the ancient world. The acquisition of paper making technology in
132/751 from Chinese prisoners of war helped the translation movement
flourish, and scientific knowledge became an asset in the socio economic
competition among viziers for the caliph's favour. Literature about the
education of scribes and ministers enjoined a rudimentary knowledge of
scientific and technical subjects.

The earliest translations that we know of were of handbooks of astronomy
with tables (Ar. zij, pi. azyaj) in Sanskrit and Pahlavi. 70 Though the astron
omers of Islamic civilisation have attained great renown for their responses to
Hellenistic astronomy, Sanskrit and Pahlavi texts attracted their attention
initially. The types of tables included varied slightly from zij to zij, but one

68 Gutas, Greek thought, Arabic culture, pp. 28 60.

69 Ibn al Nadtm, Kitab aljihrist, ed. Gustav Fliigel, 2 vols. (Cairo, 1929 30), p. 242; trans, in

Franz Rosenthal, The classical heritage in Islam, trans. Emile and Jenny Marmorstein
(Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1975), p. 48. See now George Saliba, Islamic science and the
making of the European Renaissance (Cambridge and London, 2007), pp. 15 19 and 45 72.
My account of the translation movement draws on both Saliba and Gutas's accounts.

70 The classic work on these handbooks with tables is E. S. Kennedy, 'A survey of Islamic
astronomical tables', Transactions of the American Philosophical Society, n.s., 46, 2 (1956),
p. 151. See now David King (with Julio Samso), Astronomical handbook and tables from
the Islamic world (750 1900), an interim report', Suhayl, 2 (2001).

590

The sciences in Islamic societies

would expect to find chronological tables, tables of trigonometric functions,
the equation of time (which accounts for variations in the Sun's speed),
planetary positions and positions of the fixed stars. Stars other than the Sun,
Moon and five known planets (Venus, Mercury, Mars, Jupiter and Saturn) were the fixed stars.

The earliest Arabic zij was Zij alArkand, composed in iyjI-jta^- but no longer extant, based on the seventh century Sanskrit Khandakhadyaka of Brahmagupta. 71 In the early 150s /770s, at the court of the caliph al Mansur
(d. 158/775), Ibrahim al Fazari and Ya'qub ibn Tariq (ft. c. 143/760) produced
translations that resulted in the Zij al Sindhind. 72 This zij would prove to be
quite influential in al Andalus. Al Khwarizmi's (ft. 215/830) Zij al Sindhind (no relation to the first) was the first complete, original text of astronomy from the Islamic period to survive, although not in Arabic. 73 Contemporary

scholars have worked hard to determine the origin of the contents of
zljes.
While most of the parameters in Zij al Sindhind were of Indian origin, for
example, some of the zij's contents derived from Ptolemy's (ft. 125 50)
Handy
tables. Yahya ibn Abi Mansur's (d. 215/830) al Zij al Mumtahan (Verified
astro
nomical handbook with tables) contained more Ptolemaic parameters, 74
and
then al Battani's (d. 317/929) al Zij al SabV (Sabian astronomical
handbook with
tables) indicated the ascendance of Ptolemaic planetary theory in the
astron
omy of Islamic civilisation. 75

Another application to which the zljes were well suited was astrological
forecasting. Al Khwarizmi's zij included tables with explicitly astrological
applications such as the 'Table of the projections of the rays', and al
Mansur
consulted astrologers to great public effect when he commenced the con
sanction of the new Abbasid capital at Baghdad in 145/762.. 76
Astronomy's
contributions to astrological forecasts were an interest of those
connected
with the rise of astronomy in al Andalus. The caliphs of al Andalus would
eventually declare their independence from the c Abbasids; when the
amir

71 David Pingree, 'The Greek influence on early Islamic mathematical
astronomy', JAOS,
103 (1973), P- 37-

72 Ibid, p. 38.

73 'All ibn Sulayman Hashimi, The book of the reasons behind
astronomical tables: Kitab fi 'ilal
al zijat, trans. Fu'ad Haddad and E. S. Kennedy with commentary by
David Pingree and
E. S. Kennedy (Delmar, NY, 1981), p. 224.

74 Ibid., p. 225.

75 Willy Hartner, 'al Battanf, in Charles Gillispie (ed.), Complete
dictionary of scientific
biography, 28 vols. (New York, 2008), vol. I.

76 Bernard Goldstein, Ibn al Muthannd's commentary on tfi£
astronomical tables ofal Khwarizmi
(New Haven, 1967); and Otto Neugebauer, The astronomical tables of al
Khwarizmi
(Copenhagen, 1962). On al Mansur see Gutas, Greek thought, Arabic
culture.

591

Hisham (d. 180/796) gained the throne he summoned the astrologer al
Dabbi
(d. c. 184/800), who predicted the length of his reign. 77 Al Dabbi's
writings,
however, have no trace of the influence of the Indian, Persian or Greek
texts
that spurred the translation and development of astronomy and astrology
under the 'Abbasids. After the Islamic conquest of al Andalus in 92/711
the
earliest literature on astrology and astronomy in al Andalus, such as the
Libro
de las cruces, was of a Latin and Visigothic cast. 78 But during the reign
of 'Abd
al Rahman II (r. 206 38/822 52) handbooks of astronomy with tables from
the
'Abbasids began to appear. For example, 'Abbas ibn Firnas (d. 274/887)
or
'Abbas ibn Nasih (d. after 230/844) introduced al Khwarizmi's Zij to
al Andalus. 79 Astrology was entrenched at the royal court. ° The late
fourth/tenth century Calendar of Cordoba reflected not just the
astronomy
of the Muslim east but also the application of astronomy to religious time
keeping (mlqat).

Applications: astrology

A key theme of the rise of astronomy in the Islamic world was astrology's
place as astronomy's most significant application. Some details about
several
types of forecasts in astrology are in order. Omens for example, shooting

stars or conjunctions of major planets such as Jupiter and Saturn were the
basis for predictions about nature and nations. With horoscopic astrology the
astrologer used celestial positions at the moment of a child's conception or
birth to determine, for example, financial success in life. An interrogation was
a type of prediction where an astrologer would be consulted to determine the
optimal time for a battle or another major undertaking. Technical precision in
astrology depended on accurate tables of planetary positions and some under
standing of theories of planetary motion so as to predict future planetary
positions. Astrology's lofty goals led its foremost defender in Islamic civilisa
tion, Abu Ma'shar (d. 272/886), to present astrology as the highest natural
science and to legitimise astrology with Aristotelian philosophy. 2 Astrology's

77 Julio Samso, 'La primitiva version arabe del Libro de las Cruces', in Juan Vernet (ed.),
Nuevos estudios sobre astronomia espanola en el sigh de Alfonso X (Barcelona, 1983).

78 Roser Puig, 'La astronomia en al Andalus: Aproximacion historiografica', Arbor,
142 (1992), pp. 170 1.

79 Juan Vernet and Julio Samso, 'Development of Arabic science in Andalusia', in Roshdi
Rashed and Regis Morelon (eds.), Encyclopedia of the history of Arabic science, 3 vols.
(London and New York, 1996), vol. I, p. 248.

80 Monica Rius, 'La Actitud de los emires hacia los astrologos: Entre la adiccion y el rechazo',
Identidades marginales (Serie Estudios Onomdstico Bibliogrdficos de al Andalus), 13 (2003).

81 Puig, 'La astronomia', p. 171.

82 Abu Ma'shar, al Madkhal al kaUr ila Him al nujum, ed. Richard Lemay (Naples, 1995).

The sciences in Islamic societies

inability to live up to its ambitious claims elicited critiques that would widen
the gap between astrology and astronomy.

Applications: service of Islam

Astronomy's ability to provide answers to practical problems in Islam was an
excellent justification for pursuit of that science. 83 Such religious applications
justified astronomy in the face of its most dogged sceptics. After the revelation
of verse Q 2:144 ('Turn your face towards the sacred mosque') the sacred
direction of prayer, the qibla, became the direction of Mecca, specifically
the Ka'ba. 84 Outside Mecca, qibla determination was more difficult and
very important, both for marking the qibla in mosque construction and for
individuals praying away from a mosque. Inexact methods of qibla determi
nation pre dated the technical. Islamic literature mentions methods of approx
imating the qibla based on wind directions and the rising and setting of certain
stars (anwa'). The Ka'ba itself, a structure that antedates Islam, was oriented
with respect to certain astronomical phenomena and to wind directions.
Because Muhammad's sayings were a source of revealed knowledge, a saying
of Muhammad to the effect that the qibla was to the south was sufficiently
influential so that mosques constructed through the early second/ eighth
century in locales to the north west of Mecca nevertheless faced due south.
The research of David King has shown that even after mathematical solutions
of the qibla problem appeared, there endured a parallel popular literature that
answered the same questions in a less exacting manner. How, when and

where different techniques of qibla computation were employed remain open
questions.

Technical solutions to the qibla problem appeared perhaps by the end of
the second/ eighth century and certainly by the third/ ninth. 85 The qibla
problem was akin to the construction of a great circle arc, measured on
the local meridian either from the north or from the south, between the
given locale and Mecca. The angle between that great circle arc and the local
meridian, measured from the south, is the qibla angle. Because this arc is on
the surface of a sphere, and not a plane, one's intuition of the qibla direction
is imprecise. A precise solution requires knowledge of the differences in

83 David King, 'The sacred direction in Islam: A study of the interaction of religion and
science in the Middle Ages', Interdisciplinary Science Reviews, 10 (1985), p. 319.

84 David King, 'Astronomy and Islamic society: Qibla, gnomonics, and timekeeping', in
Rashed and Morelon (eds.), Encyclopedia of the history ofArahic science, vol. I. I draw on
this article for the rest of the paragraph.

85 David King, 'Kibla', Eh, vol. V, pp. 83 8.

593

The New Cambridge History of Islam

longitude and latitude between Mecca and the given locale. Although
rudimentary spherical trigonometry, in the form of the Menelaus theorem,
was available from Hellenistic texts, other solutions to the qibla problem
elicited the most elegant formulae of spherical trigonometry that scientists

had ever developed.

Of importance too were analemmas, solutions in which one projects
the celestial sphere and its arcs onto a plane. The simplest analemmas
were
serviceable approximations: the Earth was at the centre of a circle and
diameters passed from the cardinal points through the centre of the
circle.
Then, the difference in longitude was an arc on the circumference from
the
north south diameter; the difference in latitude was an arc on the circum
ference from the east west diameter. The endpoint of the arc of the
difference
in longitude became the endpoint for a chord parallel to the north south
diameter, and the same for the difference in latitude and the east west
diameter. The approximate qibla was the line from the circle's centre
through
the intersection of the chords. Other analemmas, such as Habash al
Hasib's
(fl. c. 236/850), were more complex, but accurate because they
transformed
a spherical problem, through fully accurate geometrical constructions,
into a
planar problem. Ibn al Haytham (d. c. 432/1041) devised a universal
solution
to the qibla problem. 87 Ultimately, al Khalili (fl. 767/1365) computed
qibla tables
for all longitudes and latitudes. David King has uncovered two world
maps for
determining the qibla. The efforts necessary to develop the precise
solutions
served double duty because the qibla problem was analogous to other
prob
lems in timekeeping.

Ibn al rmqat (religious timekeeping) computed times for the five daily
prayers (daybreak, midday, afternoon, sunset and nightfall). 89 Of the
five,
the timing of the afternoon prayer was in especial need of analysis. 90
Early
Islamic sources had defined the time of that prayer to be when the length
of a
shadow was equal to the height of a gnomon casting a shadow. This
phenom
enon could not occur at certain latitudes at certain times of the year. So,
by the

86 Yusuf 'Id and E. S. Kennedy, 'Habash al Hasib's analemma for the qibla', Historia
Mdthematica, 1 (1974).

87 Ahmad S. Dallal, 'Ibn al Haytham's universal solution for finding the direction of the
qibla by calculation', Arabic Sciences and Philosophy, 5 (1995).

88 David King, World maps for finding the direction and distance to Mecca: Innovation and
tradition in Islamic science (London, Leiden, Boston and Cologne, 1999), p. xiii.

89 David King, 'Mikat', Eh, vol. VII, pp. 27 32. See now David King, In synchrony with
the heavens: Studies in astronomical timekeeping and instrumentation in medieval Islamic
civilization, 2 vols. (Leiden, 2004 5).

90 E. S. Kennedy, 'al Biruni on the Muslim times of prayer', in Peter Chelkowski (ed.), The
scholar and the saint (New York, 1975).

594

The sciences in Islamic societies

third/ninth century, legal scholars had to redefine the time of the afternoon
prayer to be when the shadow was equal to the length of the shadow at
midday plus the length of the gnomon. The definition of midday was when
the Sun was at its highest altitude for the day, and at that time the shadow was
at its shortest. Al Khwarizmf s development of prayer tables served the causes
of both convenience and accuracy. 91 NRqat served astronomers by providing
an institutional foothold in the seventh/ thirteenth century with the develop
ment of the office of muwaqqit. 92

A final example of a religious application of astronomy is lunar crescent observation. The Islamic calendar is lunar, and the beginning of a new month depends on the observation of the new crescent Moon on the evening of the twenty ninth day of the old month; the precise length of a lunar month is 29.54 days. The visibility of the lunar crescent, a problem which astron omers of Islamic civilisation treated with greater energy than Hellenistic astronomers, was especially complex because multiple variables were involved. Ya'qub ibn Tariq was one of the early scientists to work on this problem, and Habash al Hasib's zij included a table of lunar crescent visibil ities. 93 Another solution, one that considered four variables, comes from Thabit ibn Qurra (d. 288/ 901). 94 Thabit calculated the four variables for the evening of the twenty ninth day of a month: the angular distance between the Sun and the Moon; the arc of the Sun's depression under the horizon; the Moon's angular distance on the horizon from the horizon's brightest spot; and the Moon's motion on its epicycle. Then he computed the crescent's arc of visibility from all but the second. If the arc of depression was greater than the arc of visibility, then the Moon was visible. Thabit's contributions are notable not only for their sophistication, but also for how they show that a non Muslim could participate fully in science in Islamic civilisation. Though scholars disagree over the contribution of astronomy's applications to the rise of that science in Islamic civilisation, certain applications did pose interesting theoretical questions.

91 E. S. Kennedy and Mardiros Janjanian, 'The crescent visibility table in al Khwarizml's
Zij', Centaurus, 20 (1965 7).

92 David King, 'On the role of the muezzin and muwaqqit in medieval Islamic society', in
F. Jamil Ragep and Sally P. Ragep (eds.), with Steven Livesey, Tradition, transmission,
transformation: Proceedings of two conferences on pre modern science held at tfte University of
Oklahoma (Leiden, 1996).

93 Kennedy, 'A survey', p. 152; Marie Therese Debarnot, 'The zij of Habash al Hasib: A
survey of MS Istanbul Yeni Cami 784/2', in David King and George Saliba (eds.), From
deferent to equant (New York, 1987).

94 Regis Morelon, 'Tabit b. Qurra and Arabic astronomy in the ninth century', Arabic
Sciences and Philosophy, 4 (1994), pp. 118 22.

595

The astrolabe

All of these applications, whether religious or astrological, involved time keeping in some way. The best zij would be of no use without knowledge of one's location and the time of day or night. Among the instruments available to Islamic astronomers were sundials, armillary spheres and magnetic com passes (by the seventh/ thirteenth century); the most popular and versatile instrument was the astrolabe (see plate 22. i). 95 The astrolabe was an analogue computer perfect for timekeeping, a variety of mathematical computations, astrological predictions and even sighting stars. The plate of an astrolabe is a projection onto the plane of the equator of the celestial longitude (azimuth) lines for a given latitude. Over this plate rested a see through grid, known as the spider (Ar. al c ankabiit) or rete, which was a planar map of chosen constellations. One would use the alidade, similar to a rotating ruler with sights on it, to sight an object in the heavens. One then rotated the rete so that the sighted object, and thus all other objects, was in its appropriate location on the map of the heavens engraved on the astrolabe plate. While specific

features of astrolabes might differ, material frequendy engraved on astrolabes
would often include curves to determine trigonometric functions, sundials
and astrological diagrams.

Significant developments in astrolabe design occurred in al Andalus. In the
fifth/ eleventh century 'All ibn Khalaf and Ibn al Zarqalluh designed a univer
sal plate that could solve problems of spherical astronomy for all latitudes,
although universal astrolabes could not provide a picture of the heavens on
the plate. 96 Emilia Calvo's research has brought to light the improved univer
sal plate of Ibn Baso (d. 716/1316), who became chief muwaqqit in Granada. 97
Ibn Baso's plate was reproduced throughout Europe. 98

The significance of Ptolemy's Almagest

Further developments in astronomy and its applications, astrological and
religious, cannot be understood outside the context of the implications of

95 Willy Hartner, 'Asturlab', Eh, vol. I, pp. 722 8.

96 These scientists were aware of research in the Islamic east (al Mashriq). See Roser Puig,
'On the eastern sources of Ibn al Zarqalluh' s orthographic projection', in Josep
Casulleras and Julio Samso (eds.), From Baghdad to Barcelona: Studies in tfte Islamic
exact sciences in honour of Prof. Juan Vernet (Barcelona, 1996). See also Ibn al Zarqalluh,
al Shakkaziyya, ed., trans, and comm. Roser Puig (Barcelona, 1986).

orj Emilia Calvo, 'Ibn Baso's astrolabe in the Maghrib and the east', in Casulleras and Samso

(eds.), From Baghdad to Barcelona.
98 Emilia Calvo, 'Ibn Baso's universal plate and its influence on European astronomy',

Scientiarum Historia, 18 (1992).

The sciences in Islamic societies

22.1 Astrolabe. Courtesy of the Whipple Museum, Cambridge.

the reception of Ptolemy's planetary theory. Ptolemy was the single most
influential astronomer, Hellenistic or otherwise, for Islamic astronomy and
astrology. Islamic astronomers' introduction to him came, as I have men
tioned, via the growing presence of Ptolemaic parameters in the zyes. Little
time elapsed before the surviving third/ninth century translations of
Ptolemy's magnum opus, the Almagest." The Almagest's significance was that

99 Paul Kunitzsch, Der Almagest: Die Syntaxis mathematica lies Claudius Ptolemilus in arab.
latein. Uberlieferung (Wiesbaden, 1974), pp. 60 71.

The New Cambridge History of Islam

it used a wealth of observational data to derive geometrical abstractions of a
physical model of the heavens. The Almagest allows one to compute, on the
basis of the geometrical models, tables of planetary positions. A popular
(judging by the number of surviving manuscripts) recension of the Almagest

translations by NasTr al Din al Tusi (d. 672.Z12.73f.) appeared in the seventh/
thirteenth century. Al Tusi's recension spawned, through the tenth/sixteenth
century, the composition of a host of commentaries. Even the commentators'
complaints about astronomers' unfamiliarity with the original Almagest evince
its enduring relevance.

Astronomers must have reassessed important parameters as the transla
tions of the Almagest were occurring, because the later translations of the
Almagest have parameters different from those in the original. Indeed, astron
omers under the caliph al Ma'mun (d. 218/833) started a programme of
observation, mostly in the vicinities of Baghdad and Damascus, that addressed
observational questions raised by the early Almagest translations. 100 These
astronomers produced new values for important parameters such as the
length of a solar year and the dimensions of the solar model. These observa
tions resulted in al Zlj al Mumtahan. 101 Just as translations created more possi
bilities for research, research (which could include translation) sparked more
translations because a surviving Almagest translation was produced after
al Ma'mun' s death. Massive instruments were involved, such as a mural
quadrant with a radius of five metres. Through these observations Islamic
astronomers found, notably, that the solar apogee (the point of the Sun's
greatest distance from the Earth) moved independently (see fig. 22.1). I02
Mathematical analyses of the solar apogee's motion ensued.

Astronomers took an interest in Ptolemy's other texts, and by the end
of the third/ninth century Thabit ibn Qurra and others produced a trans
lation of the Planetary hypotheses. 103 In that text Ptolemy summarised his
model of the heavens in wholly physical terms. Ptolemy's physical princi
pies, which he sometimes compromised for the purpose of predictive

100 Aydin Sayili, The observatory in Islam and its place in tfie general history of the observatory
(Ankara, i960), pp. 56 63.

101 Benno van Dalen, 'A second manuscript of the Mumtahan Zif, Suhayl,
4 (2004),
pp. 28 30.

102 Regis Morelon, 'Eastern Arabic astronomy', in Rashed and Morelon
(eds.),
Encyclopedia of the history of Arabic science, vol. I, p. 26.

103 Bernard R. Goldstein, The Arabic version of Ptolemy's Planetary
hypotheses (Philadelphia,
1967). For an edition and French translation of the first book see Regis
Morelon, 'La
version arabe du Livre des hypotheses de Ptolemee', Melanges de
Vlnstitut Dominicain des
Etudes Orientales du Caire, 21 (1993).

598

The sciences in Islamic societies

the Sun

the eccentric orb
in which the Sun
travels

the orb of the
zodiac, concentric
with the Earth

22.1 The solar apogee, the Sun's greatest distance from the Earth

accuracy, assumed, supposedly, that the motions of the heavens resulted from combinations of orbs that rotated uniformly in place about an axis passing through their centre. And just as aJ Ma'mun's astronomers revised
Ptolemy's parameters, Ptolemy's views about how concentric orbs could move each other came into question. 104 The attention to the physical consistency of astronomical theories that would lead to the outstanding innovations of the seventh/ thirteenth century and beyond had already emerged.

The astronomy of the ninth, tenth and eleventh centuries

The general impression scholarship has provided of the astronomy of the third/ninth, fourth/tenth and fifth/eleventh centuries is that topics of math
ematical and observational astronomy were paramount. c Abd al Rahman al Sufi (d. 376/986) focused on observations and instrumentation and pro duced a book on fixed stars that was best known in al Andalus, Iran and

104 George Saliba, 'Early Arabic critique of Ptolemaic cosmology: A ninth century
text on the motion of the celestial spheres', Journal for the History of Astronomy,
25 test)-

599

accuracy, assumed, supposedly, that the motions of the heavens resulted from combinations of orbs that rotated uniformly in place about an axis passing through their centre. And just as aJ Ma'mun's astronomers revised
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text on the motion of the celestial spheres', Journal for the History of Astronomy,
25 test)-

599

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The New Cambridge History of Islam

Europe. 105 Thabit ibn Qurra's involvement with the translation of the Almagest
led to mathematical studies of important problems from the Almagest. Thabit
was the first to ask the question of a mobile's speed at a particular point. 10 A
host of theoretical questions arose from the construction of instruments such
as sundials, an instrument necessary for the determination of prayer times. 107

Most sundials have to be recalibrated for different latitudes. Thabit produced
mathematical analyses of a sundial valid for all latitudes, and his interest in that
instrument led him to purely theoretical examinations of conic sections.
Thabit's grandson Ibrahim ibn Sinan (d. 335/946) extended Thabit's analysis
of sundials and conic sections. Ibrahim was particularly interested in the
application of the geometry of conic sections to lenses and burning mirrors.
While much of al Birums (d. c. 442/1050) output is probably lost, what has
survived is prodigious by any standard. He too was a gifted ethnographer
(to wit his India) and historian of insatiable curiosity, upon whom we rely for
much of our history of observations in Islamic civilisation. A native speaker of
Khwarazmian, al Biruni had to depend on the study of foreign languages,
and composed works in Arabic and Persian. He also translated several texts
from Sanskrit into Arabic, and knew something of Greek, Hebrew and Syriac.
In astronomy, his most important work was an enormous zij entitled al Qanun
al Mas c udi. m His study of Greek, Hebrew and particularly Sanskrit, among
other languages, meant that the section of al Qanun al Mas c udi on calendars
was a few hundred pages long. He treated topics of descriptive and mathe
matical geography in exhaustive detail, too. Al Birums knowledge of the
history of his subject allowed him to present the range of available approaches
to solving a problem, from the common to the elegant and refined. His
mathematical analysis of the motion of the solar apogee stands out. 109
Al Birums Kitab maqalid Him al hay'a (Book of the keys of astronomy) was
an important work on spherical trigonometry that also had a section on hay'a's
astrological applications. 110 Abu al Wafa 1 al Buzajani (d. c. 387/997?.), whose

105 Julio Samso and Merce Comes, 'al Sufi and Alfonso X', Archives Internationales d'Histoire
des Sciences, 38 (1988).

106 Morelon, 'Tabit b. Qurra'.

107 Roshdi Rashed and Helene Bellosta, Ibrahim ibn Sinan: Logique et geometric au Xe siecle
(Leiden, Boston and Cologne, 2000).

108 al BIruni, Kitab al qanun al mas'udi, 3 vols. (Hyderabad, 1954 6).

109 W. Hartner and M. Schramm, 'al Biruni and the theory of the solar apogee: An
example of originality in Arabic science', in A. C. Crombie (ed.), Scientific change
(London, 1963).

no al Biruni, Kitab maqalid Him al hay'a: La trigonometric spherique chez les Arabes de Vest a la
fin du Xe siecle, ed. and trans. Marie Therese Debarnot (Damascus, 1985), pp. 276 90.

600

The sciences in Islamic societies

work was a foundation for al Biruni' s research, co operated with him on simultaneous lunar eclipse observations in two different cities. 111 By compar
ing local time at the time of the eclipse they could obtain the difference in
longitude between the cities. In addition to his observational work, Abu al Wafa] al Buzajani wrote a book, entitled al Majisti (The almagest), on spherical trigonometry.

Finally, recent research has shown that theoretical questions did not escape the attention of these astronomers. For example, when Thabit critiqued the assumptions underlying the physical operation of Ptolemy's lunar model, he did not assume a qualitative difference between celestial and
terrestrial physics; when Ptolemy spoke of the heavens as unchanging, he
had implied such a distinction. There are seeds of an important transforma
tion of astronomy from a branch of natural philosophy in the Hellenistic

tradition to a science that could and should stand on its own. For instance,
al Biruni rejected the necessity of any relationship between astronomy and
physics, specifically Ptolemy's recourse to the findings of physics to prove
the sphericity of the heavens. 112 By doing so, Ptolemy, in al Birum's view,
added nothing to astronomy's prestige. Conversely, when Ptolemy insinu
ated that observations could prove that the Earth was at rest, i.e. not rotating
in place, al Biruni agreed. Later, in the ninth/ fifteenth century, al Qushji
(d. 879/1474) would argue that since observations could not prove that the
Earth was not rotating, there was no impediment to considering the Earth's
rotation. 113 We have seen that critiques of Ptolemy's attention to physical
principles emerged relatively early in the history of astronomy in Islamic
civilisation. These critiques broadly resembled attacks on astrology's claims
about physical causes.

The eleventh and twelfth centuries in Andalusia
Abu '1 Qasim Maslama al Majritfs (d. c. 398/1007) adaptation of al Khwarizmi's
Zy to alAndalus was a harbinger of a productive period of astronomy in
al Andalus. 114 The best known figure of the period was Ibn al Zarqalluh
(d. 493/1100). A contributor to the Toledan tables of Sa'id alAndalusi, Ibn
al Zarqalluh was also the first known Islamic astronomer to write that the

in al Biruni, Kitab tahdld nihaydt al amakin li tasliih masafat al masakin, ed. P. Bulgakov
(Cairo, 1964), p. 250.

112 F. Jamil Ragep, "Tusi and Copernicus: The Earth's motion in context', Science in
Context, 14 (2001).

113 F.Jamil Ragep, 'Freeing astronomy from philosophy: An aspect of Islamic influence on
science', Osiris, n.s. 16 (2001).

114 Juan Vernet, 'al Madjritf, Eh, vol. V, pp. 1109 10.

601

motion of the solar apogee was not equal to the motion in precession, and thus
not equal to the motion of the ecliptic. 115 Ibn al Kammad's (fl. sixth/ twelfth
century) zij tells us about Ibn al Zarqalluh's solar theory, and Ibn al Ha'im
(fl. 602/1205) relied on Ibn al Zarqalluh's solar theory." Connected to Ibn al Zarqalluh's work on the universal astrolabe was his instrument that deter
mined the Earth Moon distance graphically. 117

During the fifth/ eleventh and sixth/twelfth centuries astronomers in al Andalus devoted more attention than their counterparts in the Islamic east
to the development of theories to explain trepidation and variations in the
obliquity of the ecliptic. The obliquity of the ecliptic is the angle, in the vicinity
of 23. 5 , between the celestial equator and the zodiac. Astronomers had also
believed that they detected trepidation, variations in the Sun's position in the zodiac at the time of the equinoxes. Theories to explain one or both of these phenomena depended on accurate measurements of these parameters.
Observations throughout the history of astronomy in Islamic civilisation, at
the seventh /thirteenth century observatory at Maragha for example, pro duced new values for the rate of precession. Although the existence of both
trepidation and variations in the obliquity was always open to question, astronomers nevertheless did develop models first for trepidation, and then
for both phenomena in combination. Such models had originated in the work
of eastern astronomers such as Thabit ibn Qurra and al Battani. 11

The first combined theories showed only how one model could account for
both phenomena. Andalusians such as Ibn al Zarqalluh and Ibn al Ha'im proposed more sophisticated models that considered the precise parameters

of both the changes in the obliquity and trepidation, and acknowledged that
the ranges of their variation were different. 119 The models that explain both
phenomena in combination are of historical importance due to their structural
similarities with the models that Andalusian astronomers would develop to
try to reform Ptolemy. Astrologers, for their part, were quite interested in

115 G.J. Toomer, 'The solar theory of al Zarqal: A history of errors', Centaurus, 14
(1969).

116 Jose Chabas and Bernard Goldstein, 'Andalusian astronomy: al Zij al muqtabis of Ibn
al Kammad', Archive for the History of the Exact Sciences, 48 (1994); see also Emilia Calvo,
'Astronomical theories related to the Sun in Ibn al Ha'im's al Zij al kamilfl ta'alim',
ZGA1W, 12 (1998).

117 Roser Puig, 'al Zarqalluh's graphical method for finding lunar distances', Centaurus,
32 (1989).

118 F. Jamil Ragep, 'al Battani, cosmology, and the early history of trepidation in Islam',
in Casulleras and Samso (eds.), From Baghdad to Barcelona, pp. 353 4.

119 Merce Comes, 'Ibn al Ha'im's trepidation model', Suhayl, 2 (2001).

602

The sciences in Islamic societies

the impact of trepidation and variations in the obliquity of the ecliptic
on forecasts.

Changes in the discipline of astronomy

By the fourth/ tenth century critiques of astrology had come to a head in the
Islamic east. These critiques would force astronomy to become more
independent not only of astrology but also of the natural philosophy upon
which astrology depended. Al Brruni wrote against astrology in his al Qanun
al Mas'udi; and his handbook of astrology, Kitab al tafhim (Book of instruc
tion), was composed for a royal patron and adopted a distanced position.
Astrology's prestige relative to astronomy's other applications had declined.
Why did astrology's position decline? Writers in the ancient world such as
Cicero, in De divinatione, and Augustine, in City of God, formulated cogent
critiques of astrology that resurfaced after the rise of Islam. Astrology
threatened God's absolute unity and omnipotence. Astrologers were also
often wrong, and had difficulty explaining why, for example, identical twins
could lead lives that were not at all identical. More important, as even
Hellenistic texts had distinguished between astronomy and astrology, the
most serious arguments against astrology attacked its foundations in
Hellenistic philosophy. 120 Astronomy shared with astrology many of those
foundations.

Ibn Sina (d. 428/1037), who refuted many of astrology's claims himself,
produced a text on the classification of the sciences in which astrology (Him ah
ham al nujum) and astronomy (Him al hay'a) were no longer grouped together
in the same category. 121 Ibn alAkfani's (d. 749/1348) classification of the
sciences presented an Him al hay'a that concentrated on holistic qualitative
and quantitative descriptions of the orbs. 122 This new type of Him al hay'a
had become the locus for most of Islamic astronomy's outstanding
achievements.

Considerations of physical consistency

llm al hay'a texts maintained an overt distance from questions of
metaphysics.

Instead, writers on Him al hay'a asked descriptive questions. Ibn al Haytham

120 Saliba, 'Astronomy and astrology', p. 152.

121 Ibn Sina, 'FT aqsam al 'uhim al 'aqliyya', in Tis' rasd'il fi al hikma wa 'I tabiHyyat
(Constantinople, 1880), pp. 71 81.

122 Ibn al Akfam, Irshdd al qasid ila asna al maqdsid, ed. 'Abd al Latff Muhammad al Abd
(Cairo, 1978), p. 144.

603

The New Cambridge History of Islam

the equation

apogee

Sun's actual path, whether
via epicycle or eccentric orb

wall of the eccentric
orb carrying the
Sun

concentric deferent

22.2 Eccentric and epicyclic orbs, two hypotheses for celestial motions

(d. c. 432/1041) asked whether Ptolemy's configurations of orbs could move as
described, and found that they could not. Ibn al Haytham's al Shukuk l ala
Batlamyus (Doubts against Ptolemy) catalogued the physical inconsistencies
of Ptolemy's Almagest and Planetary hypotheses. 12,3 On one level Ptolemy trans
gressed Aristotle's principle that the observed celestial motions result from
combinations of uniformly rotating orbs; on another, Ibn al Haytham's cri
tiques arose from a consideration of how orbs must rotate. An orb could not
rotate uniformly about an axis that did not pass through the orb's centre. 124
The model for the Sun's motions is an excellent introduction to the foundation
of all Ptolemaic (and Islamic) planetary theory. The simplest model would be
to suppose that the Sun moves embedded in the wall of an orb (see fig. 22.2);
the Earth would be at the centre of that orb. Babylonian astronomers,
however, had observed variations in the Sun's motion, and Ptolemy used,

123 Ibn al Haytham, al Shukuk 'ala Batlamyus, ed. A. I. Sabra and Nabil Shehaby (Cairo, 1971).

124 See A. I. Sabra, 'Configuring the universe: Aporetic, problem solving, and kinematic
modeling as themes of Arabic astronomy', Perspectives in Science, 6 (1998); George
Saliba, 'Arabic versus Greek astronomy: A debate over the foundations of science',
Perspectives in Science, 8 (2000); A. I. Sabra, 'Reply to Saliba', Perspectives in Science,
8 (2000).

The sciences in Islamic societies

planet

22.3 The equant point, the centre of the planet's mean motion, but not the centre of any orb

as Hipparchus had, these variations to refine a solar model. 125 If the centre of
the Sun's orb were removed from the centre of the Earth, the resulting model
would account for the observed anomalies. In addition, Ptolemy noted that if
the Sun were moving on a small circle known as an epicycle, which was
carried in turn on a large circle at whose centre was the Earth, an equivalent
motion would result.

In the models for the outer planets (Mars, Jupiter and Saturn) Ptolemy
employed the principle of an orb eccentric to the centre of the Earth to
account for the planet's mean motion in longitude. An analogy with the
solar model would suggest that the centre of the planet's motion on the
eccentric orb is at the centre of that orb, from which the centre of the Earth
was removed by a given amount. Ptolemy's careful analysis found that
the centre of the planet's mean motion in longitude was not the centre of
the eccentric deferent orb. Nor was that motion uniform about the centre
of the Earth. The motion was uniform about another point called the equant
(see fig. 22.3), which was removed from the centre of the orb on the opposite
side from the Earth. Indeed, the fact that the eccentric orb, according to
Ptolemy, would have to rotate uniformly about a point other than its centre

125 Otto Neugebauer, History of ancient mathematical astronomy, 3 vols. (New York,
Heidelberg and Berlin, 1975), vol. I, p. 56.

The New Cambridge History of Islam

contradicted the Aristotelian principle of the heavens' uniform circular motion. Moreover, one could not conceive of an orb moving in place about an axis that did not pass through its centre. So Ptolemy's innovative mathe matical approach to determining the centre of the planet's motion on the eccentric orb led to the problem of the equant that Ibn al Haytham noted.

Related to the problem of the equant were other cases where Ptolemy had failed to propose a conceivable physical mover for observed motions of the celestial bodies. Ibn al Haytham's doubts were not restricted to matters of physical consistency; he noted the discrepancy between the apparent and predicted size of the Sun. Indeed, the ensuing programme to reform Ptolemy was comprehensive.

The reforms of the Maragha astronomers
Beginning in the mid seventh/ thirteenth century, Islamic astronomers pro posed new models that preserved, and in some cases improved, Ptolemy's models' correspondence with observations. These models did not suffer from the physical inconsistencies arising from the equant point. In other words, these new, non Ptolemaic models no longer posited that the axis of any orb's uniform motion should pass through the equant. Many figures in that line of research who wrote Hhn al hay'a texts with these new models, such as Mu'ayyad al Din al 'Urdl (d. 664/1266), Nasir al Din al Tusi (d. 672/1273^, and Qutb al Din al Shirazi (d. 711/1311), were associated with the Maragha

Observatory in Azerbaijan. 12 Later figures, such as Sadr al Din al Shari'a
(d. 747/1347) and Ibn al Shatir (d. 777/1375), composed works in the intellectual
tradition of the astronomers at Maragha. 127 Al 'Urdi was, in addition, respon
sible for the engineering of the Maragha Observatory's instruments that were
a part of the observational programme there. These instruments' design was
influential, and would later be mirrored, for example, by the instruments at
the Jai Singh Observatory in Jaipur, India. Though Ibn al Shatir' s theories

126 On al 'Urdl's astronomy see George Saliba, The astronomical work ofMu'ayyad al Din al
'Urdi (Kitab al hay'a): A thirteenth century reform of Ptolemaic astronomy (Beirut, 1990). On
al Tusfs astronomy see F.J. Ragep (ed., trans, znd coram.), Nasiral Din al Tusi's memoir
on astronomy (al Tadhkira fi 'ilm al hay'a), 2 vols. (New York and Berlin, 1993). On al
Shirazi's astronomy see George Saliba, 'Arabic planetary theories after the eleventh
century AD', in Rashed and Morelon (eds.), Encyclopedia of the history of Arabic science.
See now Robert Morrison, 'Qutb al Din al Shirazi's hypotheses for celestial motions',
Journal for the History of Arabic Science, 13 (2005).

127 Ahmad Dallal, An Islamic response to Greek astronomy: Kitab ta'dll al aflak of Sadr
al Shaifa (Leiden, Cologne and Boston, 1995). See also George Saliba, 'Theory and
observation in Islamic astronomy: The work of Ibn al Shatir of Damascus (d. 1375)',
Journal for the History of Astronomy, 18 (1987).

21.4 The Tusi Couple, the basis of a model that solved the equant problem

improved on those of the astronomers at Maragha, his revised solar model
relied on observational considerations. The Maragha Observatory was nota
ble, too, because it drew its financial support from the revenues of a waqf, an
endowment to serve religious purposes. The construction of non Ptolemaic
models continued at least into the tenth/ sixteenth century, as Shams al Din
al Khafri (d. 957/1550) proposed multiple mathematically equivalent models
for the complicated motions of the planet Mercury. I2h In addition, a circum
stantial link has appeared between the Maragha astronomers and Renaissance
astronomers such as Copernicus- ng

Al Shirazi, al Tusi's student, enumerated in his writings four hypotheses or
principles (usut) common to these post Ptolemaic models. One of these hypo
theses was the Tus Couple, so named by contemporary scholars because it first
appeared in the work of al Tusi It was based on the following lemma; we
assume a small circle inside a large circle, with the radius of one the diameter of
the other, and their circumferences are tangent at a given point (see fig. 22.4).

128 George SaKba, 'A redeployment of mathematics in a sixteenth century Arabic critique of
Ptolemaic astronomy 1 , jn A. Hasnawi, A Fdamrani Jamal and M. Aouad (eds.), Perspectives
arabes et m&Jievnies stir in tradition scientifique rtpJiiioKJpfriffuegrec<jue(Leuven and Paris, 1997).

129 Saliba, Islamic science, pp. 195 232 and P. Jamil Ragep, ' £ AE Qushji and Regiomontanus:

Eccentric transformations and Copemican revolutions', Journal for tite History of
Astronomy, 36 (2005).

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The New Cambridge History of Islam

If the large circle moves in one direction with a given angular velocity, and the
small circle moves in the opposite direction at twice that angular velocity, then a
given point oscillates on the diameter of the large circle. If these circles become
the belts of orbs, one has the foundation of a physically consistent model in
which the planet's mean motion is uniform about the equant point. Al Shirazi
used the TusI Couple to rebut Aristotle's statement in the Physics (262a) that
there must be rest between two contradictory motions; al Shirazi in addition
mentioned an experiment one could perform to disprove Aristotle's contention
that there must be rest between two contradictory motions. 130 Al Shirazi' s
challenge to Aristotle demonstrates that the astronomers of Islamic civilisation,
perhaps because of criticisms of astrology and Hellenistic philosophy, came to
be less interested in defending particular principles of Aristotle than in physically
coherent models.

A second important hypothesis or principle of the post Ptolemaic models
drew on the equivalence between the eccentric and epicyclic hypotheses
present in the two versions of Ptolemy's solar model. If we think of the
distance between the equant point and the centre of the deferent orb as an
additional eccentricity, then one could attempt to account for the equant point

with an additional epicycle to carry the original epicycle centre. That solution,
however, proposed by Ibn Sina's student Abu 'Ubayd aljuzjam, distorted
planetary distances. 131 Al 'Urdi made the theory conform with observations
by proposing a second epicycle (see fig. 22.5) whose radius was half the
distance between the centre of the Ptolemaic deferent and the equant
centre. 132 That new epicycle would rotate in the same direction and with the
same angular velocity as the new deferent, whose centre was halfway between
the centre of the old deferent and the equant point. The result was that the
motion of a point on the new epicycle would be uniform about the equant
point and would almost (but not quite) trace the path of the epicycle centre in
the Ptolemaic model. Rather than explain away that remaining discrepancy
with the Ptolemaic model, al c Urdi contested Ptolemy's assumption of a
perfectly circular path for the epicycle centre. 133 After all, conclusive observa
tional proof to support a circular path for the epicycle centre did not
exist.

130 The experiment that al Shirazi proposed might be due, originally, to Ibn Butlan. See
Roshdi Rashed, 'al Quhi versus Aristotle on motion', Arabic Sciences and Philosophy,
9 (i999), PP- 17 18.

131 George Saliba, 'Ibn Sina and Abu 'Ubayd aljuzjam: The problem of the Ptolemaic
equant', Journal for the History of Arabic Science, 4 (1980).

132 George Saliba, 'The original source of Qutb al Din al Shirazi' s planetary model', Journal
for the History of Arabic Science, 3 (1979).

133 Saliba, Astronomical work, p. 223.

e/2

old epicycle centre

Ptolemaic equant point

e/2

new deferent centre

e/2

old deferent centre

22.5 al 'Urdi's model for planetary motions, based on the equivalence of angles at the base
of a parallelogram

Philosophers and earlier astronomers had posited such a circular path based
on empirical evidence.

Reforms of Ptolemaic astronomy in al Andalus
In al Andalus the critique of Ptolemy began at a different starting point. In the
sixth/twelfth century philosophers such as Ibn Bajja (d. 533/1138) and Ibn
Rushd (d. 594/1198) advocated a reading of Aristotle's Physics that precluded
epicyclic and eccentric orbs. 134 Neither an epicycle nor an eccentric rotated
uniformly about the centre of the Earth. Drawing on these Andalusian

philosophers, one astronomer, al Bitruji (fi. c. 600/1200), proposed models
incorporating only homocentric orbs. 135 This elimination of epicyclic and
eccentric orbs meant that al Bitrujf s models could not approach the predictive

134 A. I. Sabra, 'The Andalusian revolt against Ptolemaic astronomy: Averroes and
al BitrujT, in Everett Mendelsohn (ed.), Transformation and tradition in the sciences
(Cambridge and New York, 1984; repr. 2003).

135 Al Bitruji, On the principles of astronomy, ed., trans, and comm. Bernard R. Goldstein,
2 vols. (New Haven and London, 1971).

609

accuracy of the Maragha astronomers' models or of those of Ptolemy. In al
Bitruji's model for the Sun's motion, the Sun ventured from its observed path
through the signs of the zodiac by as much as 1.5 ! Only at four points, the
equinoxes and the solstices, did the Sun's predicted position in al Bitruji's model match observations. Still, al Bitruji's work, besides being interesting in
its own right, provides a useful contrast to understand better the essence of the
work of the Maragha astronomers. Whereas al Bitruji privileged a certain reading of Aristotle, the work of the Maragha astronomers valued consistency,
conceivability and fidelity to observations.

An attempt to improve on al Bitruji has come to light. Ibn Nahmias'

(fl. c. 800/1400) Nur al l alam (The light of the world) noted al Bitruji's theories'
lack of agreement with observations. 136 Ibn Nahmias devised improvements
that addressed such discrepancies to some extent. In order to do so he had to
introduce epicycles that rotated on the equator of the orb, but which were not
moved by a pole rotating about the pole of the orb. Ibn Nahmias' solar model
included a double circle hypothesis similar, but not identical, to the Tusi
Couple. Ibn Nahmias' increased attention to predictive accuracy and decreased
obsession with Aristotle's philosophy, along with his models' greater resem
blance to the astronomy of the East, distinguished him from the figures of the
sixth/twelfth century Andalusian response to Ptolemy that Sabra noted. 137
Diverse regional research agendas coexisted with connections between astron
omers and astronomies from different parts of the Islamic world.

Relations between astronomy and religious scholarship

This sketch of the history of astronomy in Islamic civilisation so far has
chronicled astronomy's increasing independence from its applications in
astrology, and from its foundations in Hellenistic philosophy. For religious
scholars astronomy was transformed from a science within the Aristotelian
scheme of natural philosophy into an independent science that could demon
strate God's glory. Famous statements of al Ghazali (d. 505/1111) encapsulated
the relationship of astronomy, and to a lesser extent astrology, to traditions
of religious scholarship. In a work entitled al Munqidh min al dalal
(Deliverance from error) al Ghazali noted that most of the errors of the
philosophers were in the areas of metaphysics and philosophical
theology. 138

136 Robert Morrison, 'The solar model in Joseph ibn Nahmias' Light of the world', Arabic
Sciences and Philosophy, 15 (2005).

137 Sabra, 'The Andalusian revolt'.

138 W. Montgomery Watt, The faith and practice ofal Ghazali (London, 1953), pp. 37 8.

The sciences in Islamic societies

Astronomy did not depend directly on the three questionable positions of the
philosophers that he singled out in al Munqidh min al daldl (denial of resur
rection, the eternity of the world and God's inability to know particulars).
Al Ghazali' s criticisms of Hellenistic philosophy, inasmuch as it pertained to
astronomy, were more acute in his famous Tahafut alfaldsifa (Incoherence of
the philosophers). In Discussion Seventeen of the Tahafut he disagreed with
the philosophers' position that fire causes burning in cotton: 'Observation,
however, [only] shows the occurrence [of burning] at [the time of the contact
with the fire] but does not show the occurrence [of burning] by [the fire] and
[the fact] that there is no other cause for it.' 139 This statement questioned
whether astronomers could in fact view the orbs as the proximate movers of
the planets, or whether the orbs' causal role was only apparent. If astronomy
distanced itself from Hellenistic philosophy, then could astronomers make
any statement about the structure of the universe that was not purely
contingent? Though authors of Him al hafa texts would eventually take subtle
positions in favour of the reality of their models, they would do so without
explicit recourse to Hellenistic philosophy.

Al Shrrazi, in his al Tuhfa al shahiyya (The royal gift), made an effort

to establish the principles of 'ilm al hafa directly from observation. 140 Ala 1
al Din al Qushji (d. 879/1474), who produced an innovative model for
Mercury's motions, argued in a kalam (rational speculation about God) text
that Him al hay'a could stand on its own without relying on philosophical
metaphysics. Such awareness of critiques of Hellenistic philosophy explains
reports of astronomy being studied as late as the nineteenth and early
twentieth centuries within a madrasa, a foundation for the study of Islamic
subjects, most notably Islamic law. 141 Texts of astronomy abounded in the
libraries attached to madrasas.

At the beginning of the Tahafut al Ghazali made another statement that
limited the implications of his own critique of causality. He mentioned a
scientific explanation of a lunar eclipse which 'consists in the obliteration of
the Moon's light due to the interposition of the Earth between it and the Sun,
the Earth being a sphere surrounded by the sky on all sides. Thus, when the

139 al Ghazali, The incoherence of the philosophers /Tahafut al falasifa, a parallel English Arabic
text, ed., trans, and intro. Michael E. Marmura (Provo, UT, 1997), p. 167.

140 See Ragep, 'Freeing astronomy' on al Shtrazi and al Qushji. See also Robert Morrison,
Islam and science: The intellectual career of Nizam al Din al Nisaburi (London and
New York, 2007), chap. 5.

141 Robert Morrison, 'The response of Ottoman religious scholars to European science',
Archivum Ottomanicum, 21 (2003).

611

Moon falls in the Earth's shadow, the Sun's light is severed from it.' 142 Al Ghazali rebuked those who would dispute, out of a sense of religious duty, such indubitable arithmetical and geometrical demonstrations. c Ilm al hay'a's success within a tradition of religious scholarship was due in part to the fact that criticisms of astronomy emphasised the weaknesses of its foundations in Hellenistic philosophy and not the value of its findings. Inasmuch as Him al hay'a texts ceased to situate themselves within a Hellenistic taxonomy of the sciences, in which astronomy was connected to Hellenistic philosophy, Him al hay'a became an Islamic science.

The oeuvres of some of Islamic civilisation's outstanding astronomers attest to the coexistence of scientific and religious scholarship. Al Tusi, al Shtrazi, Sadr al Shari'a and al Khafri were all religious scholars of note. In addition, Ibn al Shatir served as the timekeeper in the Grand Mosque in Damascus. Scientific and religious arguments coincided in certain texts. Fakhr al Din al Razi's (d. 606/1209) Qur'an commentary brought a great deal of astronomy and natural philosophy to bear on the Qur'an' s portrayal of nature. 143 To be sure, there were debates over the reality and validity of certain explanations for celestial phenomena, but the existence of those debates along with their religious subtexts is proof of the relevance of astronomy to themes of kalam and Qur'an commentary. A famous statement of A.dud al Din al Iji (d. 756/1355) asserted the fictionality and contingency of the astronomers' theories and sparked debate in super commentaries for centuries. 144

Most of the religious scholar/ astronomers whom I have just cited were not Arab, and while some of them did write on astrology, they did not write such texts in Arabic, the pre eminent language of Islamic scholarship. Despite astrology's loss of intellectual prestige, it endured in Islamic societies as a

craft for which there was always a steady demand. Astrology retained
some support among physicians as a foundation of disease aetiology. Even
al Ghazali had pointed out in his Ihya' Hdum al dm (Revival of the religious
sciences) that astrology was similar to medicine in that both sciences depended
on induction. 145 Nizam al Din al Nisaburi (d. c. 730/1329 30), an astronomer
and Qur'an commentator, wrote in his Persian commentary on al Tusi's Zij i
Ilkhani, and in his Qur'an commentary, that quotes in the Qur'an could be
interpreted to mean that the heavens were an instrument for God's control

142 al Ghazali, Incoherence of the philosophers, p. 6.

143 Morrison, Islam and science, chap. 6.

144 A. I. Sabra, 'Science and philosophy in medieval Islamic theology: The evidence of the
fourteenth century', ZGAIW, 9 (1994).

145 al Ghazali, Ihya' 'ulum al din, 5 vols. (Cairo, 1955), vol. I, p. 29.

612

The sciences in Islamic societies

over terrestrial events. 146 So while an author such as al Shirazi wrote on
astronomy, astrology and philosophy, these fields no longer depended
directly on each other.

To be sure, each astronomer was but a point on a broad spectrum of
opinions about astronomy's value, its applications and its relation to astrology.
Nevertheless, astronomers' sensitivity to such questions and their achievement

in relating a theoretically sophisticated astronomy to religious scholarship are
key characteristics of Islamic astronomy. The development of astronomy within
Islamic civilisation can be fully understood only with attention to astronomy's
applications and its connection to religious scholarship.

The cultures of cartography

Cartography in Islamic societies shares common ground with geography
without being part of it. Many texts on geography do not contain a single
map. Numerous maps are not connected to a text. The world of those that are
intimately linked to a verbal narrative covers a broad range of disciplines,
among them political history, creational history, pilgrimage and mathematical
cosmography. Maps were drawn or painted on paper, papier mache or cotton,
embroidered on precious silks, woven into carpets or incised into metal. They
were illustrations of manuscripts, single sheet pictures or parts of atlases,
elements of mural decoration, instruments or parts thereof and symbolic
components of miniature paintings. One set of items that could be considered
maps was tables and diagrams. 147 The other set consists of landscape paintings
and town views in miniatures adorning texts on history, military campaigns or
romances. 148 Maps served as mnemonic devices, objects of art and entertain
ment, symbols of authority and power, diplomatic gifts, instruments of war
and faith as well as organisers of order and knowledge. Maps depicted the
Earth, the stars or the universe. 149 The most vivacious and multifaceted map
culture evolved in the Ottoman empire from the ninth/fifteenth century.

146 Morrison, Islam and science, chaps 4 and 6.

147 A tabular world map can be found in Ibn Fadl Allah al 'Umarf s encyclopaedic work

Masalik al absar. A tabular map for determining the qibla for Bursa and a number of
other towns in Anatolia, Egypt, Syria and Azerbaijan is enclosed in an eighteenth
century Ottoman Egyptian manuscript. See King, World maps, pp. 92 3.

148 Examples are maps of Mecca in Nizamfs Iskandarname, Mughal town views and
landscape paintings with routes passed through by Ottoman sultans and their
armies.

149 This section discusses only terrestrial maps.

613

The New Cambridge History of Islam

It started apparently as a component of the dynasty's ambitions for recogni
tion by and superiority over other Muslim dynasties in Anatolia. In this
context Ottoman rulers, their relatives and their advisers engaged in a sus
tained support ofmadrasas, hospitals and other educational institutes as well as
in sponsoring the translation of Arabic and Persian works, including geogra
phy, cartography and other sciences. While other dynasties such as the
'Abbasids, the Fatimids, the Buyids or the Timurids were apparently lending
most of their patronage to world maps and regional maps of Islamic territ
ories, maps of sacred spaces and architectural plans, the Ottoman court's
attention also embraced maps for navigation, regulating border disputes and
the administration of water supplies. 150 Its substantial involvement in Europe
led to the integration and adaptation of a variety of Italian, Spanish, Dutch and
French maps and the emergence of a distinctive mix in the visual and
conceptual languages of Ottoman maps.

Terrestrial maps in Islamic societies cover at least five broad categories. The
first category contains maps based on astronomical observations, calculations
and geometrical constructions. Their languages were Arabic and Persian. The
institutional realm was formed by courts, which were joined by madrasas from
the seventh/thirteenth century, if not earlier. From the second/eighth to the
seventh/thirteenth centuries maps based on astronomy and mathematics
were either part of the scientific written cultures or were produced as self
contained material objects on sheets of precious metal or on spherical solids
made from paper and cloth. They were created in various regions of the
Islamic world such as Iraq, Central Asia, Egypt, Sicily, al Andalus and North
Africa. From the seventh/thirteenth to the ninth/fifteenth centuries such
maps were mostly part of one of the last chapters of treatises on Hbn al
hay'a. The regional spread of such mapmaking activities seems to have been
more limited than in the previous centuries. They are mainly known from
Iran and Central Asia. 151 Reports about cartographic research and the mapping
of coastal lines in Anatolia as well as specific Iranian territories testify to the

150 Ahmet Karamustafa, 'Introduction to Ottoman geography', in J. B. Harley and David
Woodward (eds.), The history of 'cartography , vol. II, book 1: Cartography in the traditional
Islamic and South Asian societies (Chicago and London, 1992); Ahmet Karamustafa,
'Military, administrative, and scholarly maps and plans', in Harley and Woodward
(eds.), Cartography in the traditional Islamic and South Asian societies; J. M. Rogers,
'Itineraries and town views in Ottoman histories', in Harley and Woodward (eds.),
Cartography in the traditional Islamic and South Asian societies.

151 The work on Him al hay'a of Nizam al Din al Nisaburi (sixth seventh/thirteenth four
teenth centuries), for instance, contains such a map. I thank Jamil Ragep for providing
me with a copy of it.

The sciences in Islamic societies

continued existence of interest among scholars and courtly patrons for more
than a merely literary and illustrative cartography. 152

Maps of the second category work with a geometrical symbolism
representing physical and political units such as lakes (circular), rivers (combi
nations of straight lines or arcs) or provinces (rectangles, squares or combi
nations thereof), emphasise routes linking towns, cities and ports and prefer
simplicity and minimalism with respect to details and naming. 153 They origi
nated as an independent collection of world and regional maps. Their main
commentators and transmitters were the philosopher Abu Zayd al Balkhi
(d. 322/934), al Istakhri (fl. 318 40/930 51), a member of the 'Abbasid admin
istration, and the travellers Ibn Hawqal (d. after 378/988) and Shams al Din
Muhammad ibn Ahmad al Muqaddasi (d. c. 390/1000). It is only with
al Muqaddasi that the text took on the primary position. 154 Savage Smith
argues that the features perceived by other historians as deficits (an absence
of mathematical tools and neglect of reality) should be seen as what both the
creator(s) of and later commentators on these maps wished to achieve, and
hence should be considered as conceptual properties, not deviations or fail
ures. 155 She also suggests that the apparent increase in realism achieved by Ibn
Hawqal and al Muqaddasi reflects a decrease in understanding of the original

purpose of the maps, and perhaps even a substantial conceptual shift.
156

Terrestrial maps of a similar nature can also be found in works on natural
history, the wonders of creation and the strange things on Earth and at
sea as
well as in treatises describing the whole universe. These texts proved
very
popular in various parts of the Islamic world. They are known in Arabic,
Persian and Ottoman Turkish versions. Courts and occasionally urban
com
mercial centres provided the financial and material basis. Authors,
copyists,
illustrators and patrons chose different types of maps to illustrate the
books.
The Damascene writer Shams al Din Muhammad ibn Abi Talib (d.
728/1327)

152 Muhammad ibn Najib Bakran, Jahanndmeh: Matn i jughrdffi
talifshodeh dar 605 hijri az
Muhammad b. Najib Bakran, ed. Muhammad Amin Riyabi (Tehran, 1342),
p. 7; Fuat
Sezgin, Geschichte des Arabischen Schrifttums, 12 vols., vol. X, part 1:
Mathematische
Geographic und Kartographie im Islam und ihr Fortleben im Abendland:
Historische
Darstellung (Frankfurt am Main, 2000), pp. 310 14.

153 Emilie Savage Smith, 'Memory and maps', in Farhad Daftari and
Josef W. Meri (eds.),
Culture and memory in medieval Islam: Essays in honour ofWilferd
Madelung (London and
New York, 2003), p. 120, figs. 1 4.

154 Ibid., pp. 115 16; E. Edson and E. Savage Smith, Medieval views of
the cosmos with a
foreword by Terry Jones: Picturing the universe in the Christian and
Islamic Middle Ages
(Oxford, 2004), p. 76, fig. 38.

155 Savage Smith, 'Memory and maps', pp. no, 113, 116 17.

156 Ibid., p. 116.

615

of the cosmography Nukhbat al dahrfi 'aja'ib al birr wa 'I bahr (Eternal selection
on the wonders of the land and the sea) apparently wished to provide his
readers with different types of images of the Earth such as birds, or sets of circles
or rectangles divided into smaller rectilinear units connecting them with pre
Islamic cultures. 157 The illustrator of Kharldat al'aja'ib wafarldat algharaHb
(Pearl of wonders and the uniqueness of strange [things]), a text ascribed to
Siraj al Din 'Umar ibn Muzaffar ibn al Ward! (d. 850/1456), but more likely the
work of another author, chose merely one world map in the style of Ibn
Hawqal to which he added a diagrammatic representation of various prayer
directions towards Mecca. 15 Muhammad ibn Mahmud ibn Ahmad Tusi
Salman! (sixth/ twelfth century) included highly stylised variants of world
and regional maps from the tradition of al Balkhl and his successors. 159
Zakariyya 1 ibn Muhammad al QazwM (d. 682/1283), in contrast, chose Abu
Rayhan al Birunf s map of the oceans and a diagrammatic map of the seven
climes of the ancient Greek tradition for his work. Timurid and Ottoman
translations replaced al Biruni s map by complex symbolic images of the
entire universe with (Ottoman) and without (Timurid) terrestrial maps. The
Ottoman illustrator chose a map of a completely different type acknowledging
the new geographical knowledge about Africa and South Asia available in the
tenth/ sixteenth century within the older frame of Islamic world maps sur
rounded by Mount Qaf. 1

A third category of maps presents images of sacred spaces and rituals.
Visualisation of the prayer direction started, according to King, in the late
second/eighth or early third/ninth century. 1 J Often very simple arrange
ments were made, such as taking the Ka c ba as the central point and dividing

a concentric circle or a polygon into sections that represented major cus
toms of praying attached to chosen cities or regions. 1 2 Such maps can
also
be interpreted as diagrams. Other specimens are arranged in a tabular
form.
Such an arrangement implies that it was not absolute position but
relational
position that mattered to the creator of the map, both in respect to the
Holy

157 A. Mehren, Cosmographie de Chems ed Din Abou Abdallah
Mohammed ed Dimichque
(St Petersburg, 1866).

158 MS Paris, BNF, Arabe 2188, ff. 2b 3a, 25b, dated 883/1479.

159 MS Paris, BNF, Supplement Persan 332, ff. 45a, 46a, 49b, 56a, 57a,
58a. This copy was
produced in Baghdad in 790/1388.

160 See www.loc.gov/rr/amed/guide/nes turkey.html.

161 King, World maps, pp. 51 4.

162 David A. King and Richard P. Lorch, 'Qibla charts, qibla maps, and
related instru
ments', in Harley and Woodward (eds.), Cartography in the traditional
Islamic and South
Asian societies; King, World maps, pp. 50 5, 92, 94, 113, 117.

The sciences in Islamic societies

Places and the localities from which one wished to pray. 163 Such maps
reflect
some familiarity with tables of geographical coordinates, which they
seem
to use in an approximate manner. A profound and intimate knowledge of

mathematics, geography and astronomy is embodied in a Mecca centred
map known today as engraved onto three Safavid astrolabes. The rectazi
muthal projection invented by the map's creator works with arcs of
ellipses
rather than arcs of circles. The Safavid astrolabe makers, however,
followed
the standard usage of arcs of circles for engraving astronomical and
astro
logical curves on instruments. 164 While King argued that a scholar of
the Abbasid period, possibly Habash al Hasib, invented the projection,
Hogendijk suggests that the inventor lived a century later, and possibly
in Iran. 165

Other maps of this category provide the traveller with a pictorial guide
for
either visiting the pilgrimage sites or remembering their visit. They
appear in
various intellectual and material settings. They can adorn texts on the
advan
tages of Mecca and Medina and related matters or decorate colourful
tiles. 1
They can be part of portolan chart atlases or be painted on single sheets
of
paper or rolls of paper reinforced cloth. 167 In the latter form they are a
certificate either for an executed pilgrimage or a pilgrimage by proxy. 1
These maps come primarily from commercial urban centres where they
were sold to a wider public. The maps certifying a pilgrimage were
produced
by local artisans and signed by major notables of the holy sites. Most of
the
extant specimens are linked to Mecca and Medina. A few maps also
include
Jerusalem or represent Shfite sites such as KarbalaV 69

163 King, World maps, p. 92.

164 David A. King, 'Safavid world maps centred on Mecca: A third
example and some new
insights on their original inspiration', in David A. King, In synchrony with
the heavens:
Studies in astronomical timekeeping and instrumentation in Islamic
civilization, 2 vols.
(Boston and Leiden, 2004 5), vol. I: Tfte call of the Muezzin, studies I IX,
study VIIc,
P- 843.

165 See King, World maps, pp. 197 364; King, In synchrony with the heavens, vol. I, p. 842.

166 Sheila S. Blair and Jonathan M. Bloom, The art and architecture of Islam 1250 1800 (New
Haven, 1995), figs. 307, 332; Mikhail B. Piotrovsky and John Vrieze (gen. ed.), Heavenly
art, earthly beauty: Art of Islam, exhibition, De Nieuwe Kerk, Amsterdam (16 December
1999 24 April 2000), pp. 78 83, nos. 15 17c; Ahmet Ertug and Oleg Grabar, In pursuit of
excellence: Works of art from the Museum of Turkish and Islamic Arts, Istanbul (Istanbul,
1993), plates 103A C, 103D.

167 See the qibla diagram in the atlas made by 'All al Sharafi al Safaqusi in 979/1571: MS
Oxford, Bodleian Library, Marsh 294, fo. 4b; Monica Herrera Casais, 'The nautical
atlases of All al Sharafi', Suhayl, 8 (2008) pp. 236, 246; King, World maps, p. 55.

168 Rogers, 'Itineraries and town views in Ottoman histories', p. 244; Ertug and Grabar, In
pursuit of excellence, plate 7.

169 Rogers, 'Itineraries and town views in Ottoman histories', p. 244.

617

The New Cambridge History of Islam

The fourth category of maps focuses on the representation of oceans, lakes,
rivers and water supply channels. Maps of individual seas, lakes and rivers
such as the Mediterranean Sea, the Indian Ocean, the Caspian Sea, the Nile,
the Euphrates or the Indus were part of cartographic or geographical works
such as Muhammad al Khwarizmi's Swat al ard (Image of the Earth), the

collection of maps of the Balkhi tradition and the recently discovered copy
of a book on trade, travel, geography and wonders most probably compiled by
an fifth/ eleventh century Fatimid administrator at Tinnis in Egypt. 170 They do
not seem to be directly connected to Ptolemy's Geography. They are probably
an independent outcome of mapmaking in Islamic societies.

A new group of maps of the Mediterranean Sea emerged in the eighth/ fourteenth century. Their portrait of the coastal lines comes close to natural
conditions. Its nomenclature was at first a mixture of Arabic, Catalan, Venetian and other Italian place names. Later, other languages spoken in the Mediterranean basin can be found too. In addition to the physical space,
these charts picture political, economic and cultural knowledge and beliefs
in form of rulers, tents, clothing, cushions, flags and inscriptions. The Arabic
and later Ottoman Turkish portolan charts share many geographical, visual
and verbal elements with their contemporary pendants made at Majorca, in
Italy, Portugal, Spain or France. It is often claimed that Arabic and Ottoman
Turkish portolan charts are mere copies of Catalan or Italian specimens or
vice versa. 171 A closer inspection both of the nomenclature and the rich symbolism suggests, however, that multiple ways of exchange of knowledge
and iconography linked the different centres of portolan chart making across
the Mediterranean Sea. 172

A special group within this category is formed by maritime handbooks that
picture islands in the Mediterranean Sea as well as fortresses and ports along
its coasts. In the early tenth/sixteenth century the sailor and later admiral of
the Ottoman fleet PM Rels (d. 963/1554^ compiled his highly successful Kitab
i bahriye (Book of the sea). He dedicated the book in two variants to the

170 MS Paris, BNF, Arabe 2214, ff. 52b 53a. Jeremy Johns and Emilie Savage Smith, 'The
book of curiosities: A newly discovered series of Islamic maps', Imago Mundi, 55 (2003);
Edson and Savage Smith, Medieval views of the cosmos, p. 92, fig. 46, p. 94, fig. 47, p. 96,
fig. 48, p. 98, fig. 49-

171 Sezgin, Mathematische Geographic und Kartographie, vol. X, pp. 300 15, vol. XI, pp. 13 26;
Svat Soucek, 'Islamic charting in the Mediterranean', in Harley and Woodward (eds.),
Cartography in the traditional Islamic and South Asian societies, pp. 263 5.

172 Sonja Brentjes, 'Revisiting Catalan portolan charts: Do they contain elements of
Asian provenance?', in Philippe Foret and Andreas Kaplony (eds.), The journey of maps
and images on tfie Silk Road, Brill's Inner Asian Library 21 (Leiden and Boston, 2008),
pp. 186 98.

Ottoman sultans Selim I (r. 918 26/1512 20) and Süleyman (926 74/ 1520 66). 173 A few other, partly anonymous, Ottoman maritime handbooks
and collections of maps of the Mediterranean, the Aegean and the Black Sea
are extant from the tenth/sixteenth or eleventh/ seventeenth century. The names of their authors, such as Ali Macar Reis (d. 980/1571?) or Mehmet Reis
<fi. c. 999/i59of), confirm that they too were linked to the Ottoman naval forces. 174

The last category consists of maps that visualise towns or parts of towns such as buildings or gardens. Maps of towns can be found occasionally in early

manuscripts such as the map of al Mahdiyya in the anonymous Fatimid manuscript. 175 Most maps of towns known from Islamic societies, however,
illustrate Ottoman and Mughal books on military campaigns and dynastic histories or are visual expressions of planned or ongoing sieges and battles. 176
Maps of buildings and gardens are mostly architectural plans. They had been
sketched in the 'Abbasid period. They appear to have been used as a regular
architects' tool from the Timurid dynasty. 177

The boundaries between these broad classes of maps made were fairly flexible. Numerous global, regional and local maps show traces from other
mapping cultures. The formation of hybrids was a lively cross cultural practice
in a number of Islamic societies. The Fatimid maps combine Ptolemaic features with the symbolism of the Balkhi tradition, al Khwarizrms map of
the Nile and the rectangular subdivisions in al Dimashqi's book 178 The world
map for Iskandar Sultan merges the symbolism of the Balkhi tradition with a
displaced symbolic line of longitude degrees, Chinese mountains and a focus
on the Timurid world. The world map in a non mathematical treatise on timekeeping (dated 697/i2iof.) ascribed to a certain Siraj al Din wa'l Dunya,
identified by King with the well known legal scholar Siraj al Din Muhammad
ibn Muhammad al Sajawandl (fi. c. 597/1200), appears to position its cities and
towns in a rectangular coordinate system. Due to its errors and deviations
from scientific astronomy, King considers the map a distorted copy of an

173 Svat Soucek, Piri Reis and Turkish mapmaking after Columbus: The Khalili portolan atlas
(London, 1995); Soucek, 'Islamic charting in the Mediterranean', pp. 265 79.

174 Soucek, Piri Reis and Turkish mapmaking, pp. 10 33; Svat Soucek, 'The 'Ali Macar Reis
adas' and the Deniz kitabi: Their place in the genre of portolan charts and atlases',

Imago Mundi, 25 (1971); Soucek, 'Islamic charting in the Mediterranean', pp. 279 87.

175 Edson and Savage Smith, Medieval views of the cosmos, p. 91, fig. 45.

176 Blair and Bloom, The art and architecture of Islam, figs. 3, 268, 306.

177 Lisa Golombek and Donald Wilber, The Timurid architecture of Iran and Turan, 2 vols.
(Princeton, 1988), vol. I, pp. 138 9, 211.

178 Edson and Savage Smith, Medieval views of the cosmos, pp. 79 80, fig. 39, p. 82, fig. 40.

original world map of the first category to which Siraj al Din wa'l Dunya added elements of traditional non mathematical astronomy. 179 As Ottoman
versions of translated Latin maps from Gerhard Mercator's Atlas minor (edition
by Henricus Hondius, Arnheim 1622) indicate, men of different origin and
background often collaborated in the production of cartographic hybrids. The
scholar and scribe of the Ottoman army Hajji Khalifa (Katib Celebi, d. 1069/
1658) worked together with Mehmed Ikhlasi, a convert, possibly of French
origin, in this translation. But it was members of Istanbul workshops calligraphers and painters who produced fully Ottomanised and occasionally
even modernised editions of the copies of Mercator's maps, badly transliter
ated and executed without much care by the two scholars. The maps attached
to Hajji Khalifa's Cihannutna (Version 2) as produced in the first half of
the twelfth/eighteenth century in an Istanbul workshop replaced all trans

literations with local names, privileged manual precision over the application

of instruments and treated maps as part of the text, analogous with

■ ■ _ 180
miniatures.

The sciences and the arts

Art historians have argued for several decades that illustrated Hellenistic and
Byzantine scientific works are one of the most important roots of painting as
practised in the Abbasid and Fatimid empires, although Hoffmann underlined
that the beginnings of illustrations in Arabic manuscripts in general remain
rather uncertain. 1 J Additionally, Coptic and Syriac church painting offered
important artistic styles and techniques that were used by Christian artists

179 David A. King, 'A world map in the tradition of al Birum (ca. 1040) and al Khazim
(ca. 1120) presented by Siraj al Din al Sajawandl (1210)', in Frank Daelemans, Jean
Marie Duvosquel, Robert Halleux and David Juste (eds.), Melanges offerts a Hossam
Elkhadem par ses amis et ses eleves, Archives et bibliotheques de Belgique/Archief en
bibliotheekwezen in Belgie, Numero special /Extranummer 83 (Brussels, 2007),
pp. 136 42, 155.

180 Sonja Brentjes, 'Multilingualism in early modern maps', in Daelemans et al. (eds.),
Melanges offerts a Hossam Elkhadem, pp. 320 2.

181 See, for instance, Kurt Weitzmann, 'The Greek sources of Islamic scientific illustra
tions', in George C. Miles (ed.), Archaeologia orientalia: In memoriam Ernst Herzfeld
(Locust Valley, NY, 1952); D. S. Rice, 'The oldest illustrated Arabic manuscript',
BSOAS, 22, 1/3 (1959), p. 207. The assumptions that inform the thesis, however, seem

to be outdated, to say the least, in the sense that they reserve most, if not all, aspects of
active and innovative work to ancient Greek and medieval Byzantine authors, copyists
and patrons, while putting Arabic, Iranian, Turkic and other writers, painters and
sponsors from Islamic societies on the lesser level of imitators. See, for instance,
Weitzmann, 'The Greek sources', pp. 249, 251 2; Eva Rose F. Hoffman, 'The emer
gence of illustration in Arabic manuscripts: Classical legacy and Islamic

620

The sciences in Islamic societies

working for a Muslim ruler and his court, and were imitated by their Muslim
colleagues. 1 2 The translation of illustrated Greek or Syriac scientific texts was
not limited merely to the text, but included the illustrations. 183 An example
where the history of the textual transmission and the extant Greek codices
seem to support such a claim is Dioscorides' Materia medica. According to
Grube all extant Greek manuscripts contain Arabic marginalia that comment
on both the text and the illustrations. 184 According to Ibnjuljul (fl. 372/982) the
Umayyad caliph of al Andalus Abd al Rahman III (r. 300 50/912 61) received a
lavishly illustrated copy of Dioscorides' book that was used to correct and
supplement the earlier Arabic translation of Stephanos (second/ninth cen
tury). 1 5 And Ibn Abi Usaybi'a claims that his compatriot Rashid al Din ibn
al Mansur (d. c. 640/1243), inspired by an illustrated Arabic manuscript of the
Materia medica, invited a painter to join him when he travelled to observe and

collect medicinal plants. The painter's task was to produce coloured images of
the observed plants for a later illustrated book on drugs. 1

At the same time, art historians also suggest that scientific manuscripts produced in Islamic societies constitute at best a minor and less vigorous part of the art of the book in Turkic languages, Arabic and Persian. 187 The

transformation', Ph.D. thesis, Harvard University (1982), p. 14; Eva R. Hoffman, 'The
beginnings of the illustrated Arabic book: An intersection between art and scholarship',
Muqamas, 17 (2000).

182 Hoffman, 'The emergence of illustration', p. 29. A different view has been offered by
Ward, who rather sees contemporary Syriac manuscript art influenced by innovation
in Artuqid court art: Rachel Ward, 'Evidence for a school of painting at the Artuqid
court', in Julian Raby (ed.), Tfie art of Syria and thejazira 1100 1250 (Oxford, 1985), p. 80.
Nassar, moreover, points to the concurrent presence of stylistic elements of Byzantine
and Saljuq origin in most of the illustrated manuscripts extant from the sixth/twelfth
and seventh/ thirteenth centuries, whether Arabic or Syriac: Nahla Nassar, 'Saljuq or
Byzantine: Two related styles of Jazrran miniature painting', in Raby (ed.), The art of
Syria and thejazira 1100 1250, pp. 86 8, 92 3, 96 7. She concludes that this interchange
able use of motifs of diverse provenance and the appearance of the same motifs in
Jaziran metalwork implies the emergence of 'a single school of painting, albeit of a
markedly eclectic character . . . The artists were inspired by Byzantine and Saljuq art, no
doubt, but they changed, mixed and added to these borrowed elements to create a new
style of their own' (p. 97).

183 Hoffman, 'The emergence of illustration', pp. 98, 100, in 14.

184 Ernst J. Grube, 'Materialien zum Dioskurides Arabicus', in Richard Ettinghausen (ed.),

Aus der Welt der islamischen Kunst: Festschrift fur Ernst Kiihnel zum 75. Gehurtstag am
26.10.195j (Berlin, 1959), p. 166.

185 Ibid., p. 168.

186 Ibid., p. 169.

187 See, for instance, Rice, 'The oldest illustrated Arabic manuscript', p. 207. A very similar
point of view was expressed by Anna Contadini in her paper at the Arab Painting: Text
and Image in Illustrated Arabic Manuscripts conference, SOAS, London, 17 and 18
September 2004.

621

relationship between the arts and the sciences in Islamic societies was, how
ever, more complex than these views suggest. Mediterranean pre Islamic arts
and sciences were not the only sources of inspiration. Pre Islamic Iranian and
Central Asian arts brought their own share, as did, after the Samanid and
Qarakhanid dynasties, Chinese and Turkic artists. 1 The sciences showed a
great variability in their involvement in the process of illustration. The
kind of illustrations added to a scientific text also differed substantially.
Mathematical, astronomical and magical texts often contain only diagrams,
which were not perceived as art. Exceptions are [Abd al Rahman al Sufi's
star catalogue Kitab suwar al kawakib al thabita (The book of constellations)
and a Safavid copy of Qutb al Din al ShTrazi's work on planetary theory,
al Tuhfa al shahiyya. They share their spheres of production and readership
with works that contain only very few diagrams, such as works on natural

history, agriculture and mechanics. Such texts are often adorned by series of
images of individual animals, plants, astrological signs, marvels, monsters or
machines. The various pictorial sequences that illustrate Arabic, Persian, and
Turkic copies and translations, for instance of Abu Zakariyya 1 al Qazwinf s
1 Aja'ib al makhluqat wa ghara'ib al mawjudat (The wonders of creation and
strange things in existence) indicate the vivacious processes of adapting the
text and its images to the taste, interest and scientific outlook of a particular
court and its surrounding culture. 189 Books on medicine, pharmacy and
astrology could be even more lavishly illustrated. Those from the seventh/
thirteenth century often carry frontispieces and so called portraits of authors
that are comparable to those adorning books on literature. Examples are
the well known images of the Pseudo Galenic Kitab al diryaq or Dioscorides'
Materia medica produced for rulers of local dynasties in Central Asia

Chinese paintings and painters are said to have been present at the Samanid court in
the form of maps, royal portraits and images adorning Rudakl's versification of the
fables of Kaffla wa Dimna. See, for instance, Vladimir Minorsky, 'The older preface to
the Shah nama', in Studi orientalistici in onore di Giorgio Levi della Vida, 2 vols. (Rome,
1956), vol. II, p. 168. Manichaean and shamanist elements are discussed in Emel Esin,
'An angel figure in the miscellany album H.2152 of Topkapi', in Oktay Aslanapa (ed.),
Beitrdge zur Kunstgeschichte Asiens: In memoriam Ernst Diez, Istanbul Universitesi
Edebiyat Fakiiltesi, Sanat Tarihi Enstitusii 1 (Istanbul, 1963).

Karin Riihrdanz, 'Populare Naturkunde illustriert: Text und Bild in persischen 'Ajahb
Handschriften spatjala'iridischer und fruhtimuridischer Zeit', Studia Iranica, 34 (2005);
Karin Riihrdanz, 'Illustrated Persian 'aja'ib al makhluqat manuscripts and their function

in early modern times', in A.J. Newman (ed.), Society and culture in the early modem
Middle East (Leiden, 2003); Karin Riihrdanz, 'Qazwini's 'aja'ib al makhluqat in illustrated
Timurid manuscripts', in M. Szuppe (ed.), Iran: Questions et connaissances, Actes du IVe
Congres Europeen des Etudes Iraniennes, Paris 1999, vol. II: Periodes medievale et modern,
Studia Iranica, Cahiers 26 (Paris, 2002).

622

The sciences in Islamic societies

and Iraq. 190 In the following centuries producers of illustrated medical, pharmaceutical and astrological manuscripts applied calligraphy, geometrical
ornaments and other forms of artful divisions of space to give for instance
Abu '1 Hasan Ibn Butlan's (d. 458/1066) Taqwim alsihha (The regime of health)
the same artistic appearance as texts on religion, the occult arts and wisdom
sayings. 191 Mamluk society encouraged illustrations of botanical and other
texts, while painting animals seems to have been discouraged in some scholarly circles, as implied by an act of self censorship by Ibn Fadl Allah al TJmari (d. 749/1349) in Damascus. 192 In Ilkhanid, Timurid and Safavid
Iran elaborate decorations of cover pages, titles and margins were applied
indiscriminately to works on religion, literature, medicine and science. Copies of Ibn Slna's magisterial work al Qanun fi I tibb (The law of medicine)
produced in this mode show the same style of artistic decoration as manu scripts of the Qur'an. 193 The Ottoman art of the book applied such decorative
style also to mathematical works as Euclid's Elements. An example is the Ottoman manuscript Valide Turhan 217 in the Siileymaniye Library, which

is dated 893/1487. It was in the possession of a physician before it came into
Turhan's library. 194 Books on geography and cartography are mostly illus
trated by world maps, regional maps, town plans and diagrams for the
determination of the qibla. The maps' integration into different disciplinary
contexts shaped their appearance and artistic quality. Maps in works on Him al
hay'a are often drawn freehand with little attention to exactitude in either
form or content. Their attention is on geographical coordinates, the size of the
Earth's circumference and the seven climates. Often it appears to have been of
a symbolic nature rather than an exercise of practised science. In contrast,
maps in works linked with trade, travel, postal routes, marvels and cultural
contest show a broad range of pictorial styles, although their main geo
graphical language, as a rule, does not alter very much. The Persian

190 Grube, 'Materialien zum Dioskurides Arabicus', pp. 169 80; Eva R. Hoffman, 'The
author portrait in thirteenth century Arabic manuscripts: A new Islamic context for a
Late Antique tradition', Muqarnas, 10 (1993).

191 A Vombre d'Avicenne: La medecine au temps des califes (Paris, 1996), pp. 194, 236. Three
magnificent copies illustrated one or two hundred years after the author's death are
MSS London, BL, Or 1347, 2793 and 5590. A Persian translation was made probably in
the middle of the seventh/ thirteenth century and illustrated at the end of Ilkhanid rule
in 732/1332: A.J. Arberry, M. Minovi, E. Blochet and J. V. S. Wilkinson (eds.), Tfte
Chester Beatty Library. A catalogue of the Persian manuscripts and miniatures, 3 vols., vol. I:
MSS 101 150 (Dublin, 1959), p. 20, no. 108.

192 Bishr Fares, 'Un herbier arabe illustre du XlVe siecle', in Miles (ed.), Archaeohgia
orientalia, p. 86.

193 A Vombre d'Avicenne, pp. 72, 120.

194 MS Istanbul, Siileymaniye Library, Valide Turhan 217, frontispiece.

The New Cambridge History of Islam

geography Kitab al aqalim (The book of climates) ascribed to Nasir al Din al
Tusi, but identified as a translation of al Istakhri's Kitab al mamalik wa'l masalik
(Book of principalities and roads), for instance, integrates famous prophets and
religious stories. 195 The world map attached to one of Iskandar Sultan's
anthologies takes up an element of Chinese landscape painting. 196 Maps to
an Ottoman translation of Ibn Hawqal's Kitab swat al ard (Book of the image
of the Earth) resemble miniatures in Ottoman histories and literary works
more closely than Arabic versions of the work 197

Through the material, artistic and intellectual affiliation to the courts and
their cultures, scientific manuscripts and their disciplinary knowledge became
part of the courts' artistic, ideological and educational programmes. Art
historians have shown that the illustrations of scientific texts patronised by
three Timurid rulers Shah Rukh (r. 807 50/1404 47), Iskandar Sultan and
Ulugh Beg (r. 812 53/1409 49) differed in style and breadth as a result of
differences in personal taste, religious outlook, literary preference and polit
ical orientation. 198 The cultures of the courts also created new outlets for
scientific and sub scientific narrative and illustrative themes. After portraits of
rulers and patrons became fashionable in Ilkhanid and Timurid times, portraits
of painters and scholars followed suit in Mughal and Safavid arts. Nasir al Din
al Tusi drew the most attention of this kind of personified representation of

the sciences. 199 Works of literature such as those by Abu Muhammad Nizami
(d. c. 6oo/i202f?) not only expressed their authors' vast erudition in literature,
religious sciences, philosophy, mathematics, astronomy, astrology or alchemy
and their personal beliefs in an astrologically organised universe; 200 they
also served as major carriers of illustrative forms such as miniatures, bordures
or medallions. In the broad spectrum of themes that were covered in
these illustrations, philosophy, medicine, alchemy, astronomy /astrology,

195 H. Mzik, 'al Istahri und seine Landkarten im Buch "Suwar al Akalim" nach der
persischen Handschrift Cod. Mixt. 344 der Osterreichischen Nationalbibliothek', in
R. Kinauer and S. Balic (eds.), Veroffentlichung der Reihe Museion, 6. Reihe, 1. Bd.,
Osterreichische Nationalbibliothek (Vienna, 1965).

196 Lentz and Lowry (eds.), Timur and the princely vision, fig. 50; King, World maps, p. 144.

197 MS Bologna, UB 3611, ff. 120a, 159a, 333a, 367a.

198 For a substantial discussion of these different orientations and their respective links to
the sponsored arts and science see Lentz and Lowry (eds.), Timur and the princely vision,
pp. 78, 84, 90, 94 5, 119.

199 Francis Richard, 'Les "portraits" de Nasir al Din Tusi', in N. Pourjavady and Z. Vesel
(eds.), Nasir al Din Tusi: Philosophe et savant du XHIe siecle (Tehran, 2000), pp. 199 201,
figs. 1 4.

200 Ziva Vesel, 'Reminiscences de la magie astrale dans les Haft Peykar de Nezamf, Studia
Iranica, 24 (1995).

The sciences in Islamic societies

the linkage of these sciences with Plato, Aristotle, Alexander and Mary and the
supernatural power of sages over nature and her beasts were depicted time
and again.

The relationship between the arts and the sciences did not stop with
manuscript and miniature production. Other materials such as silk, metal,
pottery and stone were also used to produce objects of art that displayed
scientific themes. Examples are maps, magic squares, medicinal cups, zodiacal
signs, planets, the animals of the Turco Chinese duodecimal calendar, the
human representation of the micro and macro cosmos and naturalistic
images of plants and animals. Maps produced on silk or metal were to be
hung at palace walls of various dynasties ruling in Egypt, Sicily, Iran, Central
Asia and Anatolia. 202 Some of them, such as the well known work of Abu 'Abd
Allah Muhammad ibn Muhammad al Sharif al Idrisi (d. 562/1166) and the little
known work of Muhammad ibn Najib Bakran, were accompanied by textual
descriptions and explanations that have survived to our time. 203 Tiles were
used for mapping the qibla, Mecca and Medina. They were integrated into
walls of libraries, palaces and private houses. The best known exemplars are
those produced in Iznik in the tenth/ sixteenth and eleventh/ seventeenth
centuries. 204 Zodiacal signs, planets and the animals of the Turco Chinese
duodecimal calendar illustrated metal plates, coins, mirrors, pottery, bridges,
citadels, churches and madrasas in greater Iran, northern Iraq, Anatolia and
India during the Saljuq, Artuqid, Muzaffarid, Safavid and Mughal dynasties
between the sixth/twelfth and eleventh/ seventeenth centuries. 205 They
were means of expressing loyalties, establishing legitimacy, declaring the

201 See, for instance, Norah M. Titley, Miniatures from Persian manuscripts: A catalogue and
subject index of paintings from Persia, India and Turkey in the British Library and the British
Museum (London, 1977).

202 Examples are the anonymous silk maps for the Fatimid caliph al Mu'izz (r. 341 65/
52 975) and his successors; al Idrisf s map on silver for the Norman king of Sicily, Roger
II (d. 1154); Muhammad ibn Najib Bakran's map on silk made for the khwarazmshah
'Ala' al Din Muhammad (r. 596 617/1199 1220); Ahmad ibn Muhammad al Sijzi's globe
of the universe, including the heavens and the Earth, possibly made before 359/969 in
Sistan (MS Dublin, Chester Beatty 3562, fo. 17b; see al Sijzi, Treatise on geometrical
problem solving, p. viii); and anonymous Ottoman silk maps (twelfth/eighteenth
century) in the Topkapi Palace and the Archaeological Museum, Istanbul.

203 Carsten Drecoll, Idrisi aus Sizilien: Der EinfluJS eines arabischen Wissenschaftlers aufdie
Entwicklung der europaischen Geographie (Egelsbach, Frankfurt am Main, Munich and
New York, 2000).

204 J. P. Roux (ed.), LTslam dans les collections nationales (Paris, 1977), p. 116, nos. 210 21.

205 Katharina Otto Dorn, 'Darstellungen des Turco Chinesischen Tierzyklus in der isla
mischen Kunst', in O. Aslanapa (ed.), Beitrage zur Kunstgeschichte Asiens, pp. 131 65;
Nicholas Lowick, 'The religious, the royal and the popular in the figural coinage of the
Jazira', in J. Raby (ed.), The art of Syria and thejazira 1100 1250, pp. 159 74.

625

independent status of an individual ruler, influencing fate, honouring cour
tiers and eternalising private feelings, mostly love to a wife. 2,0 The use of the
human body to express the intimate relationship between the sub and supra
lunar worlds according to ancient Greek philosophical cosmology was not
widespread in the iconographic repertoire of the arts in Islamic societies. It is
found in a miniature preserved at the Wellcome Institute for the History of
Medicine in London and on a single plate preserved in the Victoria and
Albert Museum in London, which is thought to have belonged originally
to an astronomical instrument produced in eleventh/ seventeenth century
Safavid Iran. The iconography of the two images differs substantially.
The first strongly resembles the anatomical illustrations of Mansur ibn Ilya's
(fi. c. 782 93/1380 90) Tashrihi badani insan (The anatomy of the human
body) as far as the human body is concerned. 207 Its zodiacal signs show all
important features of the Near and Middle Eastern iconography of these signs,
such as the Sun rising on the back of the lion or Sagittarius shooting backwards
on a lion's body at a dragon's head at the end of the lion's tail. 20 The zodiacal
man on the Safavid copper plate resembles a Renaissance drawing and is
flanked by naked women. It is a sign of the local integration of knowledge
elements from Christian cultures in Europe by Safavid artisans, artists, mer
chants and scholars during the eleventh/ seventeenth century. 209 Naturalistic
images of plants and animals can be found in miniature paintings within
manuscripts and albums of individual leaves produced in the Ottoman,
Safavid, Mughal and Qajar dynasties between the tenth/ sixteenth and thir
teenth/ nineteenth centuries. 210 Mughal fortresses and tombs integrated this
taste for the naturalistic in their ornamentation. 211 There is, however, no study
that investigates the kind of knowledge about plants and animals that the

206 For an autograph copy of this work see Sotheby's Oriental manuscripts and miniatures
(London, Wednesday 18 October 1995), p. 43, no. 51.

207 See www.nlm nih.gov/hmd/arabic/bioM.htrnl; Andrew Newman, 'Tashrih i Mansuri:
Human anatomy between the Galenic and prophetical medical traditions', in Z. Vesel,
H. Beikbaghan and B. Thierry de Crussol des Epesse (eds.), La science dans le monde
iranien a Vepoche islamique (Tehran, 1998).

208 A Vombre d'Avicenne, p. 188; A. U. Pope and P. Ackerman, A survey of Persian art, 6 vols.
(London and New York, 1939), vol. V, plates 511 908, also plates 712, 713, 1301, 1312, 1314,
1317, 1328, 1336.

209 Victoria and Albert Museum, London, Ex. No. 209.

210 Amina Okada, Indian miniatures of the Mughal court (New York, n.d.), pp. 216 25;
Dorothea Duda, Islamische Handschriften I: Persische Handschriften Tafelband (Vienna,
1983), pp. 193 4; Stuart Cary Welch and the Metropolitan Museum of Art, Tfte Islamic
world (New York, 1987), p. in, no. 82.

211 Blair and Bloom, The art and architecture of Islam, figs. 346, 351.

626

The sciences in Islamic societies

painters acquired in their training and how it related to written compendia of
botanical and zoological knowledge.

A third major locus where the arts and the sciences met was architecture.
Although some historians of art and architecture deny that there was any

substantial exchange of knowledge and skills between architects and mathe
maticians due to social barriers in training and practice, many others, as well as
historians of mathematics, believe otherwise. 212 However, ideas vary consid
erably about where the exchange of knowledge and skills took place and what
kind of knowledge and skills were discussed and passed on. Ozdurgal, for
instance, argues on the basis of remarks in mathematical treatises that indi
vidual mathematicians in the fourth/tenth, sixth /twelfth, ninth/ fifteenth
and eleventh/ seventeenth centuries in Baghdad, Nishapur, Samarqand and
Istanbul met at least once, if not more frequently, with artisans. While the
artisans who met with Abu '1 Wafa' and 'Umar al Khayyam worked on orna
ments and serial patterns and the scientists met with them to discuss the
soundness of their methods, to teach them correct geometrical knowledge by
cut and paste and to find solutions for problems raised by the artisans, Ghiyath
al Dinjamshid al Kashi (d. 833/1429) visited the actual building site of the new
observatory in Samarqand and lent a hand when a problem arose regarding a
levelling instrument. Ca'fer Efendi (eleventh/seventeenth century), in con
trast, seems to have participated in such meetings over a period of twenty
years, and compiled a treatise based on notes he took during these meetings. 213
Obviously, the quantity and quality of the exchange as well the subject matter
differed quite remarkably. Golombek and Wilber, following previous Soviet
scholarship on Central Asian architectural remains from the Tirnurid period,
see the relationship between mathematics and architecture in this period as
one that took place mainly in the youth and early adulthood of those who
aspired to become successful architects of princes they studied all the
sciences offered in their society. The exemplar, praised in Tirnurid literature
as excelling in engineering/ geometry, design and architecture, but also skilled
in composing calendars, is Qavvam al Din Shirazi (d. 842/1438 or 844/1440). 2I4
Hence, the leading architect of a building project himself seems to have

applied geometrical, technical and artistic knowledge in the process of design
ing and erecting the building, the systemic components of which Golombek

212 Jonathan Bloom expressed this view in a paper given in Zurich in April 2004.

213 Alpay Ozdural, 'Mathematics and arts: Connections between theory and practice in the
medieval Islamic world', Historia Mathematica, 27 (2000), pp. 171 2ff.

214 Golombek and Wilber, Tirnurid architecture, vol. I, pp. 189 90.

The New Cambridge History of Islam

and Wilber describe as analytic and geometric. 215 The content of the first
component is to determine modules from which the individual rooms and
their various elements will be constructed. The content of the second is to
choose 'a single generative unit according to a set of rules derived from
geometry' and to ensure the application of correct geometrical proportions. 21
As for works that also treat architectural problems by scholars specialised in
the mathematical sciences such as Ghiyath al Din al Kashi, a comparison of
preserved Timurid architecture and its elements with al Kashi's discussion of
various arches, vaults, domes and muqarnas led Golombek and Wilber to the
conclusion that this treatise is not a comprehensive mirror of actual architec
tural practice, but rather a kind of idealising summary. 217 Dold Samplonius, in

contrast, argues that the calculations taught in Arabic and Persian manuals of
practical mathematics in regard to architecture served primarily to appraise
the needed labour and building materials. 218 She considers al Kashi to be the
mathematician who achieved the most accomplished explanations and calcu
lations of basic elements of Islamic architecture. She sees his solutions as
reflecting a well developed skill in finding approximations suitable for prac
tical purposes. 219 In reply to Golombek and Wilber, Dold Samplonius empha
sises that their comparative question is at odds with al Kashi's self expressed
purpose of calculating volumes and surfaces. According to her interpretation,
al Kashi did not mean to assist architects in their daily business. He rather
aimed to ease the life of a professional calculator by providing him with
elegant approximations that simplified the calculations. 220 A third view was
pronounced by Necipoglu. In her book on a set of architectural drawings (the
so called Topkapi scroll), made, as she argues, by Timurid Turcoman archi
tects in the ninth/fifteenth or tenth /sixteenth century, she sees the tasks of the
head architect as consisting primarily in working out designs on paper that
describe the geometrical patterns for surfaces, the arrangement of architec
tural elements and ground plans based on geometrical modules. 221 These
drawings and plans lack scale and numerical values. Their translation into

215 Ibid., pp. 138 9, 211.

216 Ibid., p. 211.

217 Ibid., p. 156.

218 Yvonne Dold Samplonius, 'Calculating surface areas and volumes in Islamic architec
ture', in Jan P. Hogendijk and Abdelhamid I. Sabra (eds.), The enterprise of science in

Islam: New perspectives (Cambridge, MA, and London, 2003), p. 237.

219 Ibid., p. 246.

220 Ibid.

221 Gulru Necipoglu, The Topkapi Scroll: Geometry and ornament in Islamic architecture:
Topkapi Palace Museum Library MS H 1956, with an essay on the geometry of the
muqarnas by Mohammad al Asad (Santa Monica, 1995), p. 50.

628

The sciences in Islamic societies

concrete buildings did not take place through calculations and precise geo
metrical constructions, but rather followed procedures of adjustment accord
ing to rules of thumb. 22,2 The calculation of cost estimates and the final
financial evaluation Necipoglu sees as in the hands of an overseer. 223

Magic, medicine and mathematics

Magic, often regarded as either an occult science or a base art, as either evil or
false, and while fought against by the Prophet Muhammad and Sunni main
stream scholars, never disappeared from Islamic societies. Rather, it was one
of the spheres where beliefs and practices from various Asian and African
tribal and urban cultures entered the realm of Islam as a religion. Several
writers, such as Maslama ibn Qasim al Qurtubi (d. 353/964), Ahmad al Bum (d.
622/1225) or [Abd al Rahman al Bistami (d. 858/1454), saw magic as the all
encompassing fundamental knowledge of the open and secret worlds that

drew from rational as well as spiritual sources. Sufis in the 'Abbasid period
such as al Hallaj (d. 309/922) developed the art of karamat, special wonders
performed by an individual friend of God through divine grace. Battles in al
Andalus were fought under the leadership of men who performed karamat. 224
Legal scholars and mutakallimiin such as Ibn Abi Zayd al Qayrawam (d. 386/
996), writing against these non prophetic wonders, rejected them as mere
magic, as the work of sorcerers and soothsayers. 225 Others taught that a
magician is an apostate and thus needed to be punished by death. A third
group accepted magic as an acceptable practice for Muslims as long as it did
not lead to death for a client and was carried out with true belief in God
Almighty. 22 The permeation of kalam by philosophy led to a stable linkage
between miracles, magic, the theory of prophecy and the theory of the
rational soul. 227 Astrological and magical practices were regarded as

222 Ibid., p. 44.

223 She does not clarify, however, whether she means the head architect or another person
involved in the process: ibid.

224 Maribel Fierro, 'The polemic about the karamat al awliya' and the development of
Sufism in al Andalus (fourth/tenth fifth/ eleventh centuries)', BSOAS, 55, 2 (1992),
pp. 246 7; Maribel Fierro, 'Opposition to Sufism in al Andalus', in Frederick de Jong
and Bernd Radtke (eds.), Islamic mysticism contested: Thirteen centuries of controversies and
polemics (Leiden, Boston and Cologne, 1999), p. 177.

225 Fierro, 'The polemic about the karamat al awliya'', p. 238.

226 See, for instance, Katib Celebi, Kesfel zunun, 2 vols. (Istanbul, 1943), vol. II, cols. 1137 8:
Him al 'aza'im.

227 See, for instance, Ibn Khaldun's (d. 808 / 1406) discussion of prophecy, soothsaying,
sorcery and magic: Ibn Khaldun, al Muqaddimah: An introduction to history, trans. Franz

Rosenthal, 3 vols., 2nd edn (Princeton, 1980), vol. I, pp. 184 226, vol. Ill, pp. 156 70.

threatening in Mamluk Syria. Muwaqqits were seen by orthodox scholars such as Ibn Qayyim al Jawziyya (d. 751/1350) or Taj al Din al Subki (d. 771/
1369) as practitioners of these illicit arts who violated the standards of good
religion and good science at the same time. 2,2 Adherence to magic and astrology was not confined to popular culture and some stray muwaqqits. Several dynasties such as the Almohads (524 667/1130 1269), the Artuqids
(495 811/1101 1408), the Muzaffarids (713 95/1313 93), the Timurids, the
Ottomans and the Safavids were deeply committed to belief in horoscopes
and the magical properties of letters, numbers and signs. After the Almohads
had conquered al Andalus they coined quadratic money carrying magical signs and meaning. 229 Muzaffarid and Artuqid rulers paid for magical mirrors
and magical tablets made from precious metal. 230 Iskandar Sultan and other Timurid princes ordered artfully designed horoscopes at important moments in their careers. 231 Ottoman sultans wore magic shirts in battle or
when performing courdy rituals. 232 The Safavid shah Tahmasp (r. 930 84/
1524 76) sponsored the lavish illustration of afalname, a book on a branch of
divination. 233 The Mughal ruler Jahangir (r. 1014 37/1605 28) asked his ambas
sador to Shah 'Abbas I (r. 995 1038/ 1587 1629) to bring the shah's horoscope in
order to determine his political outlook and military strength. 234

Besides the contributions of philosophy and kalam to the debates on

miracles and magic, two other sciences, mathematics and medicine, delivered
theories, methods and tools for creating magical objects, and used magical
devices and invocations in their dealings with patients. Divinatory techniques
served for determining the kind of disease a patient was afflicted by and the
kind of therapy that would heal her. Bowls and amulets adorned by Qur'anic
verses, magic squares, the seal of Solomon and mysterious letters served for

228 John W. Livingston, 'Science and the occult in the thinking of Ibn Qayyim al Jawziyya',
JAOS, 112, 4 (1992).

229 Maribel Fierro, 'La magia en al Andalus', in A. Perez Jimenez and G. Cruz Andreotti
(eds.), Daimon Pdredros: Magos y prdcticas mdgicas en el mundo mediterrdneo (Madrid and
Malaga, 2002), pp. 270 3.

230 Douglas Barnett, Islamic metalwork in the British Museum (London, 1949), plates 16 and
17; A. Mazaharie, Der Iran und seine Kunstschatze: Albert Skira, Die Kunstschdtze der Welt
(Geneva, 1970), p. 207; Abolala Soudavar, Art of the Persian courts: Selections from the Art
and History Trust Collection (New York, 1992), p. 46, no. 17.

231 Lentz and Lowry (eds.), Timur and the princely vision.

232 Maddison and Savage Smith, Body and spirit, pp. 117 18.

233 See www.parstimes.com/events/hunt paradise.html.

234 Sanjay Subrahmanyam, 'An infernal triangle: Portuguese, Mughals and Safavids in the
first decade of the reign of Shah Abbas I', Iran and the World in the Safavid Age (London,
4 7 September 2002), available at
www.iranheritage.com/safavidconference/soas/
abstract45.htm.

The sciences in Islamic societies

preparing and administering drugs for the sick. Magic healing was very
influential in Egypt and Syria in the sixth /twelfth century under the rule
of
the Zangids (521 631/1127 1234) and Ayyubids. It is from this time that
the
earliest magic medicinal bowls are preserved and occasionally ascribed
to
princes of the ruling dynasties such as Nur al Din ibn Zangi (541 69/1146
73)
and Saladin. 235 Several inscriptions on such bowls to an Abbasid caliph
in
Baghdad as well as to Ayyubid, Mamluk and Rasulid rulers in Egypt,
Syria and
Yemen are obvious fakes. They were probably added to lend the bowls
greater authority. While the first extant magic medicinal bowls were pro
duced for and in Sunni communities, later centuries saw a special
interest
among ShTite communities in Iran, India and perhaps also South East
Asia for
such bowls. There were even workshops in China, with artisans whose
knowledge of Arabic letters and numbers was at best mediocre, but who
produced magic medicinal bowls for export to Muslim lands. 236

The mathematical sciences contributed theories and methods of
construct
ing magic squares and determining amicable numbers to the arsenal of
the
magicians from the third/ninth century. Major mathematicians such as
Thabit
ibn Qurra, Abu '1 Wafa', Ibn al Haytham or Kamal al Din al Farisi
contributed
to the evolution of sophisticated mathematical theories of amicable
numbers
and magic squares. The latter was called Him wafq al 'adad (knowledge
of the
harmonious arrangement of numbers). Both theories have their origins in
definitions, theorems and rules formulated, proven or explained through
examples in Euclid's Elements and Nicomachus' Introduction to
arithmetic? 37

On this basis, Thabit ibn Qurra established the first proven theorem for finding
a pair of even amicable numbers, which was taken up by a multitude of later
writers across different disciplines and creeds. 238 Many of them only repeated
Thabit' s rule and gave a few examples. Some legal scholars teaching mathe
matical sciences and medicine at madrasas, such as Ibn Fallus (d. 637/1239) in
Ayyubid Damascus, searched for amicable numbers in each decimal power
and calculated many correct, but also wrong, pairs. 239 Others, such as Kamal
al Din al Farisi, carried out profound theoretical research, developing new

235 Maddison and Savage Smith, Body and spirit, p. 61.

236 Ibid., pp. 76 8, 88 102.

237 See Sesiano, Un traite medieval, pp. 23 6.

238 Thabit proved a theorem equivalent to the following modern
notation: For n > 1, let p„

3.2" 1 and q n 9.2 2 "~' 1. If p n _ I; p„, and q n are prime numbers, then
a 2 n p„„,p„
and b o."q n are amicable numbers: Thabit ibn Qurra, Kitab al a'dad al
mutahabba, ed.
Ahmad Sa'idan (n.p., 1977), pp. 50 3.

239 Sonja Brentjes, 'The first seven perfect numbers and three types of
amicable numbers
in a manuscript on elementary number theory by Ibn Fallus', Erdem, 4
(1988).

concepts and applying tools from other mathematical fields such as algebra to
find a new and shorter proof for Thabit's theorem. 240

llm wafq al c adad sorts magic squares into two main classes: magic squares
filled with consecutive numbers; and those filled with non consecutive num
bers. The first class differentiates between squares of uneven, even, even times
uneven and even times even times uneven order. Further subcategories
include squares with borders or squares where even and uneven numbers
are placed in compartments. 241 The second class reduces numbers in arith
metic progression to the first class and turns then to numbers in irregular
progression. Here the issue is to finish filling a square of given size after a
subset of its cells has been inscribed by such numbers. 242. Diverse methods to
construct magic squares of arbitrary size in each of these classes as developed
by known and anonymous scholars are analysed by Sesiano. 243 The close
mathematical as well as cultural relationship between the two types of
theories led to their sharing common textual spaces. Treatises were written
that combined chapters on properties of amicable, perfect and other numbers
with subsequent sections on magic squares. 244 Authors of encyclopaedias and
texts classifying the disciplines available or recommended for study included
sections on or references to the two branches in close proximity. 245

In the ninth/fifteenth and tenth/ sixteenth centuries the cultural interest in
these mathematical theories and methods was so widespread that the section
on the harmonious arrangement of numbers from Shams al Din al Amuli's
encyclopaedia was included in one of the Persian translations of Zakariyya'
al Qazwims work, which had originally excluded all mathematical sciences
except astronomy, astrology and optics. In the eleventh/ seventeenth century

Hajji Khalifa reported that all spheres of nature and many disciplines, includ
ing mathematics, astronomy and geography, contributed to the science of

240 Kamal al Din al Farisi, Tadhkirat al ahbabfi bayan al tahabb, discussed in Roshdi Rashed,
'Nombres amiables, parties aliquotes et nombres figures aux XHIeme et XlVeme
siecles', Archive for History of Exact Sciences, 28, 2 (1983); A. G. Agargiin and Colin
R. Fletcher, 'al Farisi and the fundamental theorem of arithmetic', Historia
Mathematica, 21, 2 (1994). The authors of these papers reach different conclusions in
respect to what al Farisi did in his work and what the relationship may be between his
theorems and theorems established in later centuries in Europe.

241 Sesiano, Un traite medieval, pp. 27 83.

242 Ibid., pp. 84 125.

243 Sesiano, 'Herstellungsverfahren magischer Quadrate'; Sesiano, 'Une compilation
arabe'.

244 Sesiano, 'Une compilation arabe'.

245 Examples are Fakhr al Din al Razi's (d. 606/1209) Jami' al 'ulum; Shams al Din al
Akfani's (d. 749/1348) Irshad alqasid; Shams al Din al Amuli's Nafa'is alfunun; and
Shams al Din al Fanari's (d. 839/1435) Kitdb unmudhaj al 'ulum.

632

The sciences in Islamic societies

virtues and (special) properties. He named Kamal al Din al Farisfs purely

mathematical treatise Tadhkirat al ahbab fi bayan al tahabb (Memoir of lovers
on the declaration of mutual love) as falling into this category and teaching the
properties of amicable and inimical numbers. 14 Although the smallest pair of
even amicable numbers 220, 284 was used on amulets, the magical application
of larger pairs such as 17296, 18416 has not been attested yet. In contrast, the
largest known calculated magic squares are part of three magic charts made
during the Qajar dynasty in Iran. These squares consist of 100 rows and
columns, i.e. 10,000 cells. Their magic number, i.e. the sum of each row,
column and diagonal, is 500, 050. 247 Other objects with magic squares were
plaques, mirrors, shirts and amulets. Amulets and mirrors are extant from the
seventh/thirteenth century. It is believed that the production and usage of
magic mirrors started in Ilkhanid Iran among Sufis who venerated the twelve
imams. 248 Talismanic shirts were in use among the Ottomans, Safavids, Mughals, in West Africa among Hausas and Yorubas as well as on Java and
other Indonesian islands. Ottoman sultans such as SelTm, princes such as
Bayazid and grand viziers such as Qara Mustafa Pa§a wore them in war and
ritual. Their shirts carry numerous magic squares of up to 20 rows and columns. Safavid talismanic shirts are mostly anonymous and undated. They
carry magic squares of even larger size (40 times 40). The shirts were considered to be bullet proof vests, as Hurrem Sultan wrote to her husband
Siileyman Qanuni in the 940s /1530s. 249 They also could serve medical pur
poses, provided one took a sweaty one previously worn by a sick person or by
a woman in childbirth. 250 Protection against evil forces (demons, spirits, the
evil eye) and the power to obtain love or gain political and social favour were
also linked to shirts and undergarments decorated with magic squares, Qur'anic verses, the 100 beautiful names of God, magic alphabets and other
symbols.

Science and reform

For almost five hundred years Islamic scholarly cultures have mostly been
downplayed, or their existence has been flatly denied. Most travellers from
Italy, France, England, Germany, the United Provinces and the Habsburg

246 Katib C^elebT, Kesfel zunun, vol. II, cols. 725 6: 'tint al khawdss, col. 726.
247 Maddison and Savage Smith, Body and spirit, p. 106.

248 Ibid., p. 125.

249 Ibid., p. 117.

250 Ibid., p. 118.

empire reported that no sciences or liberal arts existed in the Ottoman empire.
The same travellers, however, acknowledged the existence of a lively schol
arly culture in the Safavid empire in Iran. 151 With regard to the Mughal empire
and other Muslim or Hindu states in India the reports oscillated between
condescending acknowledgement of some scholarly life, total silence and
praise for medical and pharmaceutical knowledge. 252 The various stories
told by these visitors from Catholic, Protestant and, later, secular European
countries continue to influence the analysis of the historical evolution of
different scientific cultures in Islamic societies in Asia and Africa. Only slowly,
during the last two decades, have new methodological approaches with new

questions started to emerge that allow for a more nuanced picture, one that
does not see the main issue as being the fact that no scientific nor industrial
revolutions took place in these societies. 253

The relationship between science and reform in the Ottoman empire reflected the centralised as well as military nature of Ottoman rule, admin
istration and institutions. Although substantial components of Ottoman soci
ety were decentralised and local, the efforts to reform certain of its aspects
concentrated mainly on the capital, the army, the fleet and military institu
tions. Some disciplines, in particular medicine, mathematics, astronomy and
cartography, were included in these efforts because they had been part of the
education of the devsirtne boys in the Palace School (Enderun). These disci
plines also became part of the reform efforts because the Ottoman court included two scientific officials among its personnel the hekim basi (head physician) and the miinejjim basi (head astrologer). These scientific officials and
their subordinate colleagues had contributed since the tenth /sixteenth cen
tury, if not earlier, to the acquisition and appropriation of new medical knowledge from Jewish, Catholic and Protestant communities and institu tions. The mixed composition of the body of Ottoman court physicians created favourable conditions for such cross cultural activities. Several head
physicians were Jewish refugees from Spain, Portugal or Italy. Christian physicians from Ottoman Greek and Armenian communities as well as from
France, Italy and other Catholic or Protestant countries in Europe also served

251 Sonja Brentjes, 'Pride and prejudice: Some factors that shaped early modern (schol
arly) encounters between "Western Europe" and the "Middle East'", in John Brooke
and Ekmeleddin Ihsanoglu (eds.), Religious values and tfte rise of science in Europe
(Istanbul, 2005).

252 Kate Teltscher, India inscribed: European and British writing on India 1600 1S00
(Delhi, 1997).

253 S. Irfan Habib and Dhruv Raina (eds.), Situating the history of science: Dialogues with
Joseph Needham (Delhi, 1999).

634

The sciences in Islamic societies

at the Ottoman court. Most of the Jewish and Ottoman Christian physicians
had studied medicine at Italian or Spanish and Portuguese universities. In the
eleventh/ seventeenth and twelfth/ eighteenth centuries Muslim court physi
cians became actively involved in the transfer of medical knowledge. New
diseases, treatments, drugs and anatomical illustrations were introduced.
Before the reforms started in the early twelfth/ eighteenth century this transfer
of new medical knowledge was characterised by its immediate integration
into newly composed texts without intermediary translations. Mustafa Feydi's
(d. 1084/ 1692) Khamsa yi hayatl (Quintet of living beings), for instance, incor
porates descriptions of new diseases and their treatments by physicians from
Italy, France, Spain and Germany. It also gives information about research on
medicinal plants imported from the Americas. 254

Oral transmission of new knowledge also took place in astronomy and
astrology. Reports by travellers such as John Greaves (1602 52) from Oxford or
Ismael Boulliau (1605 94) from Paris confirm that Arab and Turkish astro
nomers in Aleppo as well as educated Sufis in Istanbul were familiar with

Nicolaus Copernicus' (1473 1543) and Tycho Brahe's (1546 1601) astronomical
theories and books before the first Arabic and then Ottoman Turkish trans
lation of a Latin astronomical and astrological handbook printed in Paris in
1635 was produced in the 1660s. 255 Manuscripts of the head astrologer
Muneccimek Mehmed Efendi (d. 1078/ 1667) as well as other texts show that
astrological works from Catholic and Protestant Europe also circulated among
Ottoman scholars in the capital. 256

A similar practice characterised Ottoman use of geographical books and
maps from Spain and Italy during the tenth/ sixteenth and the first half of the
eleventh/ seventeenth centuries. It is in this disciplinary context that argu
ments were made to explain or justify the borrowing and assimilating of
foreign knowledge from inimical cultures and countries. The arguments
focused on the intensifying threat of Portuguese naval power in the Red Sea

254 Feza Giinergun, 'Science in the Ottoman world', in G. N. Vlahakis, I. M. Malaquias,
N. M. Brooks, F. Regourd, F. Giinergun and D. Wright (eds.), Imperialism and science:
Social impact and interaction (Santa Barbara, 2006).

255 Thomas Hyde, Geographiae veteris scriptores Graeci minores: Accedunt geographica Arabica
etc., 3 vols. (Oxford, 1712), vol. Ill, pp. 86 7. Sonja Brentjes, 'On the relationship
between the Ottoman empire and the west European Republic of Letters (17th 18th
centuries)', in AH Caksu (ed.), International Congress on Learning and Education in tfte
Ottoman World, Istanbul, 12 y April 1999: Proceedings (Istanbul, 2001), p. 139; Ekmeleddin
ihsanoglu, 'Introduction of Western science to the Ottoman world: A case study of
modern astronomy (1660 i860)', in Ekmeleddin ihsanoglu (ed.), Transfer of modern
science and technology to the Muslim world (Istanbul, 1992).

256 MS Princeton, University Library, Yahuda 373.

The New Cambridge History of Islam

and the Indian Ocean to the detriment of Ottoman interests and the well being
of the Muslim world at large. The study of geography was presented as one
important means to protect these interests. 257 Translating Latin atlases into
Ottoman Turkish became a major element in this process of cross cultural
learning in the eleventh/ seventeenth and twelfth/ eighteenth centuries. Hajji
Khalifa and Abu Bakr ibn Bahram al Dimashqi (d. 1102/ 1691) cooperated with
converts, Jesuits and Ottoman Greek scholars when translating Gerhard
Mercator's (1512 94) Atlas minor and Willem Janszoon Blaeu's (1571 1638) and
Joan Blaeu's (d. 1673) Atlas maior. Petros Baronian's (fi. 1151/1738) and 'Uthman
ibn Abd al Mannan al Muhtadfs (d. 1200/1786) translations of French and
Latin geographies confirm that members of minorities and converts continued
to participate in the acquisition of foreign knowledge during the twelfth/
eighteenth century. 258 This cross cultural collaboration ensured that the more
informal oral ways of accessing foreign knowledge remained a relevant
practice. Geographical and philosophical books available in Istanbul's numer
ous libraries were perused for valuable information without being formally
translated. 259 The results were included in new Ottoman Turkish compositions.

While Hajji Khalifa's geographical opus Cihannuma (Version 2) is seen in
current research as primarily a work of disinterested literary scholarship, there
can be no doubt that his numerous writings were seen by himself, his friends

and his successors as a contribution to the reform of Ottoman thought, if not
politics. 2 ° Reform ideas were found within a circle of high ranking Ottoman
religious office holders who challenged court behaviour on various levels.
This circle wished to return to what had worked in the past without abandon
ing every novelty. They felt that such a restoration would bring order, stability
and welfare for the whole. 2 * Ibrahim Miiteferriqa (d. 1157/ 1744), who in
1145/ 1732 printed a revised and slightly augmented version of the Cihannuma,
went a step further. He declared Ottoman participation in the allegedly
universally valid field of contemporary geography and cartography as one of

257 Thomas D. Goodrich, Tfie Ottoman Turks and tfte New World: A study of Tarih i Hind i
Garbi and sixteenth century Ottoman Americana (Wiesbaden, 1990), pp. 351, 354.

258 Ekmeleddin ihsanoglu (ed.), Osmanh cografya literatiirii tarihi: History of geographical
literature during the Ottoman period, 2 vols. (Istanbul, 2000), vol. I, pp. 132 3; Ramazan
§esen, 'The translator of the Belgrade Council Osman b. Abdulmannan', in Ihsanoglu
(ed.), Transfer of modem science and technology to the Muslim world.

259 Gottfried Hagen, Tin osmanischer Geograph bei der Arbeit: Tntstehung und Gedankenwelt
von Kdtib Celebis Cihannuma, Studien zur Sprache, Geschichte und Kultur der
Turkvolker 4 (Berlin, 2003), pp. 190 6, 218, 228 31.

260 Ibid., pp. 248 51, 254 6.

261 Ibid., pp. 255 6.

his motives for printing the book Likewise, the unfinished status of Hajji
Khalifa's Cihannuma furnished the pretext for Abu Bakr al Dimashqi's
trans
lation of the Atlas maior. He meant his own works to supersede and
replace
it. 2 2 Abu Bakr's works, prompted by a diplomatic gift of Justinus
Colyaer
(Colyer, Collier; 1596 ?), the new Dutch ambassador (1668 82) to the
Ottoman court, in 1668 and placed under the supervision and patronage
of
the grand vizier Kopriilu Fazil Ahmed Pasa (1072 87/1661 76) and his
successor
Merzifonlu Qara Mustafa Pasa, can be seen as an element in the efforts
to address the grievances of Hajji Khalifa's circle and to alleviate
tensions.
While the textual history of the translation and its subsequent editions
and
abbreviations is highly complex and not well studied, its connection with
politico military purposes seems highly likely. Travellers from Catholic
Europe reported that Koprulii Fazil Ahmed Pasa invited readings of the
work
while he waged war against Venice. In 1683 Qara Mustafa Pasa ordered
a
description of Hungary and Germany as part of the preparation of the
campaign
against Vienna. The extant text shows strong resemblance to Abu Bakr's
works. 263

The link between Ottoman scholarly works based on foreign knowledge
and Ottoman efforts to reform the army, the fleet, the administration and
parts of the education system became more explicit during the so called
Tulip
Period (1131 42/1718 30). Miiteferriqa, an important voice in this period
and of
substantial influence upon later Islamic reformist writings and
movements,
created a set of arguments for reform that were situated entirely in an
Islamic
perspective. He referred to the will and work of the divine creator, the
glorious rule of the just caliph and sultan, the exemplarity of Muslim
religious
history as compared to those of Judaism and Christianity, the loss of
territory
and culture due to superior enemies (Mongols, Castilians), the need for

tajdid (religious renewal) and ihya 1 (revival) and the appeal of Ottoman 'pan
Islamism' serving the religious, cultural and social needs of the entire Muslim
world. 264 Reichmuth proposes seeing this rhetoric as a call for a bureaucratic
state with a strong ruler and a modernised army that resonated positively among parts of the educated elite. 265 Hagen takes a slightly different stance,

262 Ibid., pp. 259 61.

263 Ibid., p. 258.

264 Stefan Reichmuth, 'Islamic reformist discourse in the Tulip Period (1718 1730): Ibrahim
Miiteferriqa and his arguments for printing', in (Jaksu (ed.) International Congress on
Learning and Education in the Ottoman World, pp. 153 8.

265 Ibid., p. 160.

637

The New Cambridge History of Islam

and emphasises that Miiteferriqa, in addition to his use of categories of the
Ottoman reform and decline discourse of the eleventh/seventeenth century,
unmistakably demanded a turn to modern sciences, technologies and forms of
msututions.

The numerous efforts to reform parts of the Ottoman army, navy and military education undertaken during the twelfth/eighteenth century took place within this complex framework that combined the traditional with the

modern, the practical with the scientific. 2 7 The new schools for engineering,
medicine and naval training were either linked to new military corps or
attached to older institutions such as the navy or those that provided the
army with weapons and gunpowder, such as the Arsenal. 2 The only other
sphere of academic reform was the Enderun. Its educational programme
incorporated elements such as geography, cartography and geometry that
were taught at the new military schools. Agoston believes that the limitations
of these reforms in size, scope and social sector do not reflect the traditionally
propounded scientific, technological or political inferiority, but rather
restraint out of fear of grave social repercussions. 269

The vast sphere of civil education provided in the madrasas remained
largely untouched, although individual scholars collected, annotated and
excerpted foreign books and maps or their translations. Although the majority
of books and maps printed abroad are stored in libraries linked to the court or
state institutions such as the Topkapi Palace, the Naval Museum or Kopriilii
Library, several madrasa libraries founded in twelfth/ eighteenth century
Istanbul by scholars such as Atif Efendi or 'Isat Efendi contain at least
Ottoman Turkish translations of the latest new maps and geographical
books. Istanbul and several other Ottoman towns linked to foreign trade
had small, stable foreign communities where books, maps, drugs, instruments
and toys such as spectacles, watches, telescopes or microscopes could be
bought and botanical gardens were founded. The availability of mechanical
clocks and watches in eleventh/ seventeenth and twelfth/ eighteenth century

266 Hagen, Ein osmanischer Geograph bei der Arbeit, pp. 262 3.

267 Ibid., pp. 264 5.

268 See Frederic Hitzel, 'Les ecoles de mathematiques turques et l'aide francaise
(i775 1798)', in Actes du sixieme congres international d'histoire economique et sociale de
VEmpire ottoman et de la Turquie (1326 i960), Aix en Provence, du ler au 4e juillet 1992,

Collection Turcica, 8 (1995); Frederic Hitzel, 'Francois Kauffer (1751?
1801): Ingenieur
cartographe francais au service de Selim III', in Ekmeleddin ihsanoglu
and Feza
Gtinergun (eds.), Science in Islamic civilisation (Istanbul, 2000).

269 Gabor Agoston, 'Ottoman warfare in Europe 1453 1826', in Jeremy
Black (ed.),
European warfare 14% 181; (London, 2002), pp. 143 4.

Istanbul is well established. 270 Other scientific instruments were less
easily
available. There are, nonetheless, a number of sources confirming that
they
were sold in the Ottoman empire. Balthasar de Monconys reported for
instance from mid eleventh/seventeenth century Cairo that he bought
long
distance sighting tubes to replace his telescopes bought in France and
lost in a
shipwreck. 271 Paul Lucas, an itinerant trader and royal emissary at the
turn of
the twelfth/ eighteenth century, listed more than a dozen microscopes
among
his wares. 272 Instrument makers in Augsburg produced at least one
telescope
for the Ottoman market. Physicians, merchants, diplomats and other
travel
lers participated in this form of exchanging new as well as old
knowledge,
largely free from state interference.

This sphere of civil education was seriously challenged only after the
period
discussed here. The reforms of the nineteenth century led to the reform
of
education in all its major aspects, i.e. contents, institutional forms and
career

opportunities, in the Ottoman empire as well as in Qajar Iran by imports from
France, Great Britain, Austria, Germany and occasionally Russia. The colo
nisation of India, Central Asia and North Africa presented another, severe
challenge to local Muslim traditions of scientific knowledge. The colonial
powers brought their own institutions, personnel, goals and forms of repres
sion that either deliberately destroyed the local traditions or forced them to
adapt in various ways to the new types of foreign knowledge. The ability of
various previous Islamic societies to incorporate, integrate and transform
foreign scientific knowledge into local traditions broke apart.

270 Otto Kurz, European clocks and watches in the Near East, Studies of the Warburg Institute
34 (London and Leiden, 1975).

271 Brentjes, 'On the relationship', p. 139.

272 Voyage du Sieur Paul Lucas au Levant, 2 vols. (Paris, 1704); Henri Omont, Missions
archeologiques frangaises en Orient aux XVIIeme et XVIIIeme siecles, 2 vols. (Paris, 1902).

639

23

Occult sciences and medicine

S. NOMANUL HAQ

In his Muqaddima (Prolegomena) the well known sage Ibn Khaldun (d. 808/1406)

reported a diversity of opinion among Muslim jurists concerning the grounds for
the imposition of the death penalty upon practitioners of magic. 1 The term he
employed here is sihr, an appellation which denotes a very wide range of occult
phenomena; it is generally rendered by scholars as 'magic' or 'sorcery' in the
generic sense, the two words often used interchangeably. Ibn Khaldun's account
constitutes one of the two classic discourses on occult sciences in medieval Islam,
and his report is, typically, of a very high historical and sociological value. For
example, one notes that it throws into relief what are the two fundamental
features of the approach to sihr in the Islamic milieu. One is the sustained belief
in the reality of sihr that it is haqq (true/real); the second, a legal determination
of its reprehensibility that the practice of sihr is a contravention of the
articulated body of divine law. But all of this needs to be qualified and
elaborated.
In the chapter 'On the sciences of sihr and tilasmat' 2 Ibn Khaldun wrote of
three degrees of the souls that have magical ability (al nufus al sahira). To the
first degree belong those that carry out their influence upon the world of
corporeal elements, or upon other souls, through their own endeavour
(himma) alone, without any external instrument or aid. In the second degree
are placed those souls that exercise such influence with the aid of the celestial
spheres or of the elements, or with the aid of the hidden properties (khawass)
of numbers. Finally, the third degree is assigned to those that work their
influence upon the powers of imagination, planting in the mind of the subject
'different sorts of phantasms, images, and pictures ... and bringing] them
down to the level of [the subject's] sensual perception'. 3

1 Ibn Khaldun, Muqaddima (Cairo, n.d.), p. 498; trans. F. Rosenthal as The Muqaddimah; An
introduction to history, 3 vols. (London, 1967), vol. Ill, p. 159.

2 Ibn Khaldun, Muqaddima, pp. 496 503; Ibn Khaldun, Muqaddima, trans. Rosenthal, vol. Ill,

pp. 156 70.

3 Ibn Khaldun, Muqaddima, trans. Rosenthal, vol. Ill, p. 158.

Occult sciences and medicine

We are then told that the practices belonging to the first degree are denoted
by the term sihr; those that are in the second degree by tifosm (from the Greek
telesma, talisman; pi. tilasmat), and that this is a subdivision of sihr; the ones
occupying the third degrees are called sha l wadha or sha'badha. 4 Ibn Khaldun
also tells us that the second degree is weaker than the first; and that while the
third one is indeed without real being, the first two constitute a robust reality
(haqiqa). He speaks emphatically: 'Know that no intelligent person doubts the
existence ofsihrl' 5

Analogous, though not identical, is the case with the fourth/tenth century
esoteric RasaHl (Episdes) of the anonymous Ikhwan al Safa' (Brethren of Purity),
the other of the two classic expositions of occult sciences in the Islamic tradition.
The Ikhwan devote their entire final and fifty second episde to 'magic (sihr),
incantations (c azaHm), and the evil eye (c ayn)'. 7 We find here a detailed discourse
on magic, including its typology and subdivisions. Thus, there is theoretical magic
and practical magic; and there is true /real magic (haqq) and false /non existent
magic (batil). To argue for that magic which is haqq the anonymous writers
invoke inter alia the entire Neoplatonic emanationist causal chain of being given

this, true/real magic, brought into being in the sensible world by means of the
soul's knowledge of astrology and celestial determinations, is as true/real as the
natural processes of the cosmos itself 9 Again, magic (of the right kind) had a
compelling reality: and this in its general thrust is standard in the culture.

Turning to the second fundamental feature of the approach to magic that Ibn Khaldun brings into relief, namely the juristic condemnation of sihr, the
matter is simple in its broad outlines but rather complex in its details, both
substantively and sociologically. The word sihr appears expressly and specif
ically in the Qur'an twenty eight times not favourably, to be sure, for it is severely denounced. The magician (sahir) is always depicted on the other side
of the believer unbeliever divide. 10 And yet the Qur'an presents a complex

4 Ibn Khaldun, Muqadditna, p. 498; Ibn Khaldun, Muqaddima, trans. Rosenthal, vol. Ill,
pp. 158 9-

5 Ibn Khaldun, Muqaddima, p. 498; Ibn Khaldun, Muqaddima, trans. Rosenthal, vol. Ill,
p. 159.

6 See P. Lory, 'La magie chez les Ikhwan al Safa'', Bulletin d'Etudes Orientales de VInstitut
Eraneais de Damas, 44 (1992); Y. Marquet, 'La determination astrale de revolution selon
Freres de la Purete, Bulletin d'Etudes Orientales de VInstitut Eraneais de Damas, 44 (1992).

7 Ikhwan al Sara', Rasa'il Ikhwan al Safa' wa khulldn al wafa', 4 vols. (Beirut, 1957), vol. IV,
pp. 283 463.

8 Ibid., pp. 312 13.

9 Ibid., pp. 407 14.

10 Q 2:102; 5:110; 6:7; 7:116; 10:76, 77, 81; 11:7; 20:57, 58, 63, 66, 71, 73; 21:3; 26:35, 49; 27:13; 28:36,

48; 34:43; 37:15; 43:30; 46:7; 52:15; 54:2; 61:6; 74:24-

picture. One notes, for example, that it does not explicitly pronounce prohib
ition on magic, nor does it explicitly speak of any penalty for its practice; as, for
example, it does, and repeatedly so, in the case of the ascription of partners to
God (shirk) or polytheism. At the same time, it admits the reality of magic and
its efficacy and, by the same token, the reality of occult beings whose aid
magicians are understood to summon, such as devils (shayatin, sing, shaytan),
fallen angels and jinn. 11

While Ibn Khaldun does not really distinguish between good/real and evil/
false magic, condemning all magicians to death in blanket terms, jurists in
general did separate permitted magic from that which is prohibited. 12 Thus,
for example, the position of Abu Hamid al Ghazali (d. 505/1111), the architect
of latter day normative Islam, is that the acquisition of esoteric knowledge
which provides magical powers is not culpable in itself; only the actual
exercise of these powers is culpable. 13

So, in one way or another, in one form or another, magic is legally and
theologically accommodated in the Islamic culture after all. The position of
the Ikhwan al Safa] was strongly favourable: while they dismissed the 'false/
non existent magic' of charlatans, they did not speak in legal terms about these
corrupt practitioners at all. 14 But then they harshly censured those who do not

consider magic worthy of attention and call it utter nonsense and a falsehood;
we are told that this was the case with the majority of people of the day (akthar
al nas) who were accustomed to accusing the wise seeker of magical sciences
with the capital sin of unbelief. Little do these people know, mourn the
Ikhwan, that magic 'is an integral part of wisdom; nay, it is the culmination
of all the sciences of wisdom'. 15 It is difficult to imagine stronger support.

The backdrop

Magic should be placed in its context. That magic and magical practices were
never altogether suppressed in the Islamic world is hardly surprising, given
that the cultural streams that fed into the ocean of Islam were all preoccupied
with magic, whether Babylonian, Greek, Harranian, Indian, Iranian or other.
But more: magic of certain peculiar kinds and occult practices of a character
istic nature were actually cultivated further in Islam, especially in three

11 See T. Fahd, Anges, demons et djinns en Islam: Sources orientales, vol. VIII (Paris, 1971).

See T. Fahd, 'Sihr', EI2, vol. IX, pp. 567 71; T. Fahd, La divination arabe (Paris, 1987).

13 al Ghazali, Ihya' 'ulum al din, 2 vols. (Damascus, 1939), vol. I, pp. 49 50.

14 Ikhwan al Safa', Rasa'il, vol. IV, pp. 314 15.

15 Ibid., p. 284.

642

specific domains: in Sufi mystical circles; in the alchemical tradition; and in
popular piety. In fact, by the time of Ibn Khaldun letter magic (Him al hurufi
and geomancy (rami) had been incorporated into the standard madrasa curricula.

What is the Qur'an' s stance on magic? Given the circumstantial variations
and the use of rhetorical devices that are so typical of the holy text, it is small
wonder that one finds in it a recognition of the reality of magic, mixed with
contrasting assertions of its illusory character. This tension is particularly
evident in the Qur'anic versions of the familiar story of Moses being pitted
against Pharaoh's magicians. 1 But what is particularly revealing, and here is
an instance of an unbroken consistency in the Qur'an, is that any efficacy of
magical acts, we are told, derived ultimately from God Himself: 17 God, then, is
the very subject of the reality of magic.

Then there is the tale of King Solomon. Under his command, as we read in
the Qur'an, were not only the winds, but also birds and jinn and demons Qifnt,
pi. 'afarit); devils assisted him. 1 And, of course, there were those occult beings,
the many angels of God; indeed, to reject these angels was no less than kufr
(Q 2:97). The Qur'an also speaks of the Spirit (al ruh) (Q 97:4); and of God's own
Spirit that he infused into Adam (Q 15:29), of the Holy Spirit (ruh al qudus) that
supported Jesus (Q 2:87, 253) and which was the agent of revelation (Q 16:102),
and of the Spirit of Trust (al ruh al amin) (Q 26:193), identified by Muslims with
Gabriel, who brought the Qur'an to the Prophet Muhammad. Satan too, the
Qur'an' s Ibhs, who had refused to prostrate himself before Adam, was at large in

this world, hidden from sight, but all the time planting evil desires into the
hearts of both prophets and ordinary folk 19 And there were demons who
thievishly attempted to break into celestial assemblies, eavesdropping on angels
and being chased away by shooting stars. 20

Sociological factors also had a role. Given the pre Islamic Arab's proverbial
preoccupation with poetry, those who rejected Muhammad accused him of
being a magician (sahir) (Q 10:2, 21:3 etc.) This accusation, we read, was made
against earlier prophets too (Q 10:76). But what is distinctive is that
Muhammad alone, of all the prophets in the Qur'an, is reported by the
revealed text to have been disparagingly called a mere kahin, a
soothsayer

16 Q 7:116; 10:81; 20:66; 20:69.

17 Q 2:102. Cf. Ahmad ibn Muhammad ibn Ibrahim al Tha'alabi, Qisas al anbiya' (Beirut,
1980), pp. 43 7-

18 Q 21:81 3; 27:15 17; 34:12 15; 38:34 40.

19 Qur'an, passim. See F. Rahman, Major themes of the Qur'an (Minneapolis, 1989), pp. 121 31.

20 Q 15:16 18; 37:6 10; 67:5; 72:8 9.

known in Semitic cultures to pronounce oracles in rhymed prose (Q 52:29,
69:42). Mentioned more frequently in the text, however, is another charge

uniquely levelled against Muhammad: that he is a shcCir, a poet, himself under
the spell of magic (mashuf).* 1 Also, he is the only apostle besides Moses who is
portrayed as one accused of being a majnun (Q 44:14), possessed by that
irrational spirit which was believed in ancient Arabia to deliver poetic inspira
tion to the afflicted. Note that 'magic' here denotes something that bewitches
or beguiles or charms or seduces or dazzles by its sheer aesthetic qualities, this
indeed being one of the meanings of sihr that the Ikhwan had noted. 2,2
Effectively what we have here, then, is an admission of the sublime language
of the Qur'an, a fact happily recognised and fully exploited by Muslims.

All of this appears to embody the larger part of that intricate backdrop
which provides a context to the occult sciences in Islam: their cultivation; their
practice; and their legal and social status. The depiction of sihr always linked
with prophecy; the images of prophets pitted against magicians; the dramatic
competition between God's clear signs and magical trickery; the contrast
between sihr and Divine Guidance (al huda); the vehement denials that
Muhammad is not a soothsayer, nor is he a magician; and, above all, the
impassioned announcements that he is not a majnun, not a poet; the portrayal
of magic in an environment of deceits and falsehoods; the admission, on the
other hand, of the reality and efficacy of magic, and the declarations of the real
existence of occult beings such as jinn, devils and angels; the descent of the
Spirit into the flow of history; the contact, even if mediated, between the
transcendental hidden and the real manifest: reflected in the vicissitudes of
sihr in Islam are all these Qur'anic motifs, with all of their inner challenges,
contrasts and tensions.

The reality of magic is confirmed and reinforced in the Muslim tradition,
particularly in the hadlth, with the stories emerging that the Prophet himself
had fallen victim to magic. In one account, an adversary is reported to have
cast a spell on him by taking a lock of his hair from a comb and depositing it in
the well. 23 Citing a widely believed variation on this story, Ibn Khaldun

reported that it was this event that occasioned the revelation of the Qur'anic
verse 'Say: And I take refuge in God from the evil of the women who blow
into knots.' He also twice quoted the Prophet's wife 'A'isha as saying, 'As soon
as the Prophet recited the Qur] an over one of those knots into which a spell

21 Q 36:69; 21:5; 37:36; 52:30; 69:41.

22 Ikhwan al Safa', Rasa'il, vol. IV, pp. 312 13.

23 Abu 'Abd Allah al Bukhari, al]ami' al saMh, ed. L. Krehl and T. W. Juynboll, 9 vols.
(Cairo, 1958), 'Book of medicine'; also elsewhere.

644

Occult sciences and medicine

against him had been placed, that particular knot became untied.' 24 So the
implication here is that the magical spell was effected through tying of knots
and blowing evil breath over them. One also finds hadlth reports in which the
Prophet speaks of the devil tying knots at the back of people's necks. 25

The cited verse appears in sura 113 of the Qur'an; it bears the title 'The crack
of dawn', and together with the following and last one, 'The humankind', it
forms the unit called Mu'awwidhatan 'The Two Seekers of Refuge (in God)'
of the standard Muslim hermeneutic tradition. 2 With their rich undulating
imagery of enveloping darkness and evil, contrasted with pure dawn and its
divine Lord, and of human beings who are manifest, juxtaposed with occult

beings who remain hidden, these Two Seekers are generally believed in the
Islamic culture, especially at the popular level, to be efficacious in warding off
evil and voiding magic spells. 27 But upon the authority of none other than the
Prophet himself, the Two Seekers are reported in numerous hadlth to have
curative powers.

Given all this, it is small wonder that even the most committed Muslim
rationalist could not possibly deny the true existence of magic: Qur'anic
doctrine asserted this, and there were numerous hadlth reports historicising
it; and there were the ghosts of the magical traditions of pre Islamic milieus
lurking about. This gave rise to a characteristically Islamic phenomenon:
explaining magic in naturalistic rationalist terms as opposed to transcendental
symbolic ones. In this way, many Muslim sages effectively bestowed
upon magic the status of a genuine science, a science that followed
rules of logic, as well as natural laws: psychological, physical and episte
mological. We have already noted that the Ikhwan argued for the ontology
of magic in terms of the Neoplatonic causal hierarchy of emanations from
intelligible hypostases, thereby giving magic as robust a reality as that of
the corporeal elements of this world. Al Ghazali's approach too was rationalistic:
he analysed magical knowledge in terms of two forms of knowledge, both
considered genuine sciences: the science of physical elements and that of
astrology. 2

24 Ibn Khaldun, Muqaddima, pp. 498, 502; Ibn Khaldun, Muqaddima, trans. Rosenthal,
vol. Ill, pp. 160, 168.

25 Muslim ibn al Hajjaj, Sahlh, ed. M. 'Abd al Baqi, 5 vols. (Cairo, 1955 6), 'Book of prayer
of travellers and shortening it'.

26 See C. E. Bosworth, E. van Donzel, W. P. Heinrichs and C. Pellat (eds.) 'Mu'awwidhatan', Eh vol. VII, pp. 269 70.

27 See W. A. Graham, Beyond the written word (Cambridge, 1989), p. 109.

28 al Ghazali, Ihya', vol. I, pp. 49 50.

The New Cambridge History of Islam

Magic, prophecy and the secret of letters

But more complex and revealing is the case of Ibn Khaldun. Reflecting a Qur'anic motif, he discusses magical powers in the context of prophecy. His argument is discursive: human souls, he says, are one in species, but they differ in their particular qualities, which come to constitute a unique natural disposition. The souls of the prophets have a particular quality by means of which they are disposed to receiving divine knowledge, to be addressed by angels and to exercise an influence upon created beings. The souls of magi cians share the last of these three prophetic attributes influencing created beings but do so by attracting the spirituality of stars (tilasni) or through their own psychic or satanic powers (sihr). Ibn Khaldun then develops a thoroughly rational psychological explanation. A soul, he observes, exercises an influence upon its own body without corporeal means; this may result from psychic perceptions for example, someone walking upon the ledge of a wall will certainly fall down if the idea of falling is strongly present in his imagination. Thus it was legitimate to suppose that if a soul can influence its own body, it can influence other bodies too. Being at pains to provide a naturalistic explanation of magic, Ibn Khaldun makes it analogous to contagion: he tells us that a harmful breath issues forth from the mouth of the magician, attaches itself to his spittle, and comes in contact with the victim. 29 This theory of

harmful breath is reminiscent of the Qur'anic 'blowing evil breath over knots',
here receiving a naturalistic treatment.

Ibn Khaldun could ultimately differentiate a prophet from a magician only on sociological and empirical as opposed to inherent and essentialist grounds, 'differentiating the two merely from obvious signs (al 'alamat al zahira)': prophets are found to be good people, entirely given to good deeds,
who work miracles (mw'jtza) for good purposes; magicians, on the other hand,
happen to be evil persons, entirely devoted to evil deeds, who work sihr for
evil purposes. 30 The difference between prophecy and magic, then, was not a
matter of essence, but happened to be a contingency.

Then, under the shadow of the prophets, an exception is made for the Sufis they too, we are told, can exercise an influence upon the world without
the mediation of corporeal causes, and involve themselves in magical practi
ces, especially in the 'science of the secrets of letters', but what they do cannot

29 Ibn Khaldun, Muqaddima, pp. 497 502 ; Ibn Khaldun, Muqaddima, trans. Rosenthal,
vol. Ill, pp. 160 1.

30 Ibn Khaldun, Muqaddima, p. 502; Ibn Khaldun, Muqaddima, trans. Rosenthal, vol. Ill,
p. 167. The expression here is al 'alamat al zahira.

Occult sciences and medicine

be counted as sihr. The reason was that the occult activities of the Sufis were

effected by divine support; this was so and here again we ultimately have a
social historical explanation because the attitude and approach of these men
result from prophecy and are a consequence of it. 31 The germs of this explicit
exception and the consequent opening of prospects for magic in the culture
are to be found in the hadith tradition, where the tenor and context of reports
keep shifting and where it was possible to find favour for magic, at least in
some form.

Magic is certainly condemned in the hadlth, and explicitly counted among
the seven most grievous sins, with the death penalty (hadd) categorically
pronounced over the magician. 32 Furthermore, magicians are placed in an
environment of fraud and trickery those who were friends of evil occult
beings. 33 But then, in contrast, the hadlth does speak of good magicians too,
those who recognised that it was God who made their spells work, 34 and the
Ikhwan confidently cite 'famous hadith reports' of the Prophet himself mag
ically reversing the spells of the evil eye. 35 And there are numerous supportive
hadith references to ruqya (sympathetic magic /charm /incantation) but with
one fundamental proviso: ruqya was always to be performed by the unique
procedure of invoking God, and none other, most often by reciting the
opening chapter of the Qur'an (al Fatiha). 36

As noted, the hadith tradition also establishes Qur'anic verses as having
healing powers, particularly the Two Seekers: it is frequently narrated that the
Prophet would recite them and then blow his breath over the ailing body as a
cure. But, most noteworthy here, by far the largest single collection of reports
about the occult powers of the Qur'an are to be found in the section on
medicine (tibb) in the hadith collections: these reports appear in a context of
naturalistic drug recipes and medically accepted surgical modes of treatment
that is, in a scientific environment. This explains another unique peculiarity of

the milieu: in Islamic sources we find that the therapeutic use of medicines
proper and of medicinal plants is also classified among magical practices that
is, as a kind of sihr. Thus, 'seeking help from the specific properties of
medicines' is one of the several types of magic listed in the standard

31 Ibn Khaldun, Muqaddima, p. 502; Ibn Khaldun, Muqaddima, trans. Rosenthal, vol. Ill,
p. 167.

32 Specific hadith references in Fahd, 'Sihr', p. 569.

33 Bukhari, Sahih, 'Beginning of creation'.

34 Ibid., 'Book of the virtues of the Prophet and his Companions'.

35 Ikhwan al Safa', Rasd'il, vol. IV, pp. 310 11.

36 Bukhari, Sahih, 'Book of medicine'.

647

eleventh/seventeenth century bio bibliographic source of Hajji Khalifa (Katib
Celebi, d. 1069/1658), the indispensable Kashf al zunun. 37

We have now reached the threshold of a profound irony of Islamic culture:
throughout the history of Islam we hear loud Muslim voices denying that the
Qur'an is a work of poetry; and yet, on the other hand, from the very
formative years of Islam we see the literary qualities of the highly stylised
language of the Qur'an being jealously celebrated by Muslims, a celebration

that fed into the Arabic poetic tradition. Indeed, the cadence and sweep, the
rhythms and rhymes, the imagery and rhetorical flourishes, the metaphors
and symbolism; all of this could not but arouse at the humanistic level a sense
of aesthetic wonder, a sense of 'magic'. So with Sufism all of this was raised
from the analytical domain of literary criticism into the metaphysical domain
of the occult: soon Sufis developed elaborate theories about mysterious
magical powers of the words and letters of the Qur] an. It is only in this context
that we can make a 'local', historical sense of the growth in Islam of a
particularly mature tradition of letter magic, and of the widely cultivated
science of the secrets of letters; no other culture seems to show this degree of
speculative preoccupation with the letters of the alphabet.

In particular, Sufis spoke of the occult powers of two kinds of linguistic
units: first, those letters of the Qur'an that are known as 'the spelled out' ones
(al muqattcfat) fourteen of the twenty eight (twenty nine on some counts)
letters of the Arabic alphabet, occurring in rhythmic rhyming modes, singly or
in combination, at the beginning of 29 of the 114 of suras of the Qur'an; and
second, appellative words of the Qur'an that denote divine attributes, words
known by the Qur'anic phrase 'the Most Beautiful Names' of God (al asrrta' al
husna), and fixed at ninety nine in number by the tradition. The ontological
basis is a correspondence between natures and letters: natures living in letters
and letters embodied in natures. One finds a strong metaphysical Sufi expres
sion of this in the quasi pantheistic thinking of Ibn al 'Arab! (d. 638/1240), who
considered the created world as so many manifestations or epiphanies of the
Most Beautiful Names. 38

Over the years we see grafted upon this, and often variously integrated into
the speculations on the occult mysteries of the letters of the Arabic alphabet, a
range of indigenous disciplines, and much of the Aristotelian and Neoplatonic

cosmology as well as the hermetic and Pythagorean lore from the theory
of
four Empedoclean elements, Aristotle's system of potency and act, and
the

37 Hajji Khalifa, Kashf al zunun, ed. G. Flugel, 7 vols. (London, 1835 58).
38 See H. Corbin, Creative imagination in tfte Sufism of Ibn 'AraU
(Princeton, 1969).

Occult sciences and medicine

Plotinian metaphysics of hypostases and emanation, to the cosmology of
the
four natures (taba'f, sing. taV ltab?a), and the hermetic doctrine of occult
specific properties of things (khawass); and from numerology and
phonetics to
philology, musical theory and prosody. Of course, the most elaborate and
complex embodiment of the fullness of this phenomenon is the Balance of
Letters (rmzan al huruf) doctrine attributed to Jabir ibn Hayyan, the
enigmatic
alchemist of Islam. 39 We shall meet him in detail later on. However, it is
important at this point to note that the field crucial to magic a field with
which magic is found to be intimately and indispensably connected, both
by its
practitioners and its primary historians, and upon which magic has been
considered by the tradition to be ultimately based is astrology. 40

By the end of the Middle Ages Islamic culture had accumulated a fairly
large
body of magical literature, though much of it consisted of tantalising
pseudo
tracts. As sources of magical knowledge Ibn Khaldun cites the familiar
Nabataean agriculture attributed to Ibn Wahshiyya (b. second half of the
third/ninth century), but most probably written by the later Abu al Qasim
al Zahrawi (d. c. 400/1009); 41 he also cites another well known work,
the
Ghayat al hakim (Aim of the sage, Lat. Picatrix) of Maslama ibn Qasim al
Qurtubi (d. 353/964), incorrectly attributed to the mathematician
Maslama ibn
Ahmad al Majriti (d. c. 398/1007). 4i Also mentioned by Ibn Khaldun is an

obscure magical treatise of one Tumtum the Indian, its subject matter being
astrological magic. 43

But missing from the Muqaddima is an important early work relevant to the
history both of alchemy and magic, the Kitab sirr al asrar (The book of secret of
secrets; Lat. Secretum secretorum) of Pseudo Aristotle, a book of advice to kings
written around the end of second /eighth century: this work is important to
scholars in that it is the bearer of that enigmatic but immensely influential
string of a dozen cryptic aphorisms, the hermetic Tabula smaragdina or
'Emerald tablet', al Lawh al zumurrudx in Arabic, purporting to reveal to the

39 For a critical edition and annotated translation of ajabirian Balance of Letters discourse
see S. Nomanul Haq, Names, natures and things: The alchemist jabir ibn Hayyan and his
Kitab al ahjar (Dordrecht, Boston and London, 1994).

40 See, for example, Ikhwan al Safa', Rasa'il, vol. IV, pp. 286 7.

41 Fahd, 'Sihr', p. 569.

42 For a history of modern scholarly treatments of the text see D. Pingree, 'al Tabarionthe
prayers to the planets', Bulletin d'Etudes Orientales de Vlnstitut Francais de Damas, 44
(1992). For the authorship question see F. Sezgin, Geschichte der arabischen Schrifttums, 9
vols. (Leiden, 1967 84), vol. IV, pp. 294 8; M. Fierro, 'Batinism in al Andalus: Maslama
b. Qasim al Qurtubi (d. 353/964), author of the Rutbat al hakim and the Ghayat al hakim
(Picatrix)', SI, 84 (1996), 87 112; Fahd, 'Sihr', p. 568.

43 Ibn Khaldun, Muqaddima, trans. Rosenthal, vol. Ill, p. 156, n. 748.

649

seeker the whole secret of occult sciences. 44 This 'Tablet', which was even
read by Isaac Newton, 45 is also found in the Sirr al khaliqa (Secret of creation),
another hermetic text falsely attributed to the first century CE
Neopythagorean sage Apollonius of Tyana (Ar. Balinas), 46 and this may well
be earlier than the Sirr al asrar. 47 Another early work in this Arabic hermetic
cluster, still not dated by scholars, is the treatise on astrological magic the
Istimatis. 48

There are two early texts whose fortunes are easier to trace, both of them of
seminal importance in the history of occult sciences: the Kitab al madkhal al
kabir ila Him ahkatn al nujum (Comprehensive introduction to the science of
astrology) of the hermetic sage Abu Ma'shar al Balkhi (d. 272/886), the
Albumasar of the Latins; the treatise is a compilation embodying a complex
mixture of Persian, Indian and Greek ideas and methodologies. 49 Second, the
Kitab al thamara (Book of the fruit), a collection of one hundred astrological
propositions attributed to the second century CE Greek astronomer Ptolemy,
but actually put together around 310/922 by one Abu Ja'far Ahmad ibn Yusuf,
a mathematician, physician and astrologer. This second tract, the celebrated
Centiloquium in its twelfth century Latin translation, remained indispensable
reading for European physicians until the end of the seventeenth century. 50
Abu Ja'far explained occult sciences in naturalistic terms, without invoking
transcendental beings or symbolic causes.

44 J. Ruska, 'Tabula smaragdina'.- Ein Beitrag zur Geschichte der hermetischen Literatur
(Heidelberg, 1926). Cf. J. Needham, Science and civilisation in China, vol. V, part 4
(Cambridge, 1980), p. 368.

45 For Newton's obsessive involvement in alchemy see B.J. Dobbs, The Janus faces of
genius: The role of alchemy in Newton's thought (Cambridge, 1991), pp. 66 73.

46 Pseudo Apollonius of Tyana, Kitab sirr al khaliqa wa san'at al tabta, ed. U. Weisser
(Aleppo, 1979).

47 For the question of dating and the Arabic Balinas tradition see Haq, Names, natures and
things, pp. 29 39, 203 5.

48 C. S. F. Burnett, Arabic, Greek and Latin works on astrological magic attributed to
Aristode', in J. Kraye, W. F. Ryan and C. B. Schmitt (eds.), Pseudo Aristotle in the Middle
Ages (London, 1986).

49 Abu Ma'shar, The abbreviations of the introduction to astrology, together with the medieval
translation cfAdelard of Bath, ed. and trans. C. S. F. Burnett and K. Yamamoto (Leiden,
1994); D. Pingree, Abu Ma'shar', in C. D. Gillispie (ed. in chief), Dictionary of scientific
biography, 18 vols. (New York, 1970 80), vol. I, pp. 32 9. See also R. Lemay, 'L'Islam
historique et les sciences occultes', Bulletin d'Etudes Orientales de Vlnstitut Francais de
Damns, 44 (1992).

50 Ptolemy, Ptolemy's Tetrabiblos, or Quadripartite: Being four books of the influence of the stars.
Newly translated from the Greek paraphrase ofProclus. With a preface, explanatory notes, and
an appendix, containing extracts from the Almagest of Ptolemy, and tfie whole of his
Centiloquy; together with a short notice of Mr Ranger's Zodiacal planisphere, and an
explanatory plate (London, 1822); Lemay, 'L'Islam historique', pp. 27 9.

Occult sciences and medicine

By the time Hajji Khalifa wrote his Kashfal zunun around the second half of
the eleventh/ seventeenth century well into the Ottoman Safavid Mughal
period he could name as many as fourteen developed techniques and
concepts that are denoted by the term sihr, each having its own esoteric
vocabulary. Included among these were divination (kihana) and invocation
of the planets (da'wat al kawakib al sayyara); 51 occult specific properties
(khawass) of letters and numbers, and of the Most Beautiful Names; conjura
tion and incantation Qaza'im); summoning of spirits (istihdar); natural magic
(niranjdt); phylacteries; disappearance from sight (khafa'); and ruqya and
sympathetic spells and charms (ta'alluq al qalb, lit. 'attachment to the heart').
But, most significantly, also listed here are techniques of working artifice and
fraud (hiyal), and the counter discipline of exposing and reversing them (kashf
al dakk); and, as we have noted, dispensation of the specific properties of
medicines. Characteristically, our early modern compiler considers sihr as one
of the naturalistic physical sciences.

Revisiting alchemy

When we turn to alchemy in Islamic tradition, something that was most
important for the history of science, we are in a confused field: obscure here,
pellucid there, now esoteric, now open, at times unmistakably Aristotelian, at
times utterly wrapped in hermeticism a field that still awaits fuller attention
from modern scholars, especially in view of the fact that Isaac Newton's
extensive involvement in alchemy, and hence its relevance to the Scientific

Revolution, has now been brought into focus. To say anything definitive about Islamic alchemy, then, is hardly possible at this stage of our research,
and any generalisation made must remain tentative. 52

Jabir ibn Hayyan and Abu Bakr al Razi (d. 313/925) are the greatest names in
the history of Arab alchemy, though for very different reasons. 53 But numer
ous personages figure in this story, some genuine alchemists, others falsely
reputed to be so, yet others entirely legendary. Traditional accounts begin

51 See D. Pingree, 'al Tabari on the prayers'.

52 For a comprehensive survey of the Islamic alchemical tradition see Needham, Science
and civilisation.

53 See Paul Kraus's still unsurpassed Jabir ibn Hayyan, vol. I: he corpus des ecrits Jabiriens
(Cairo, 1943), vol. II: Jabir et la science Grecque (Cairo, 1942). See also Haq, Names, natures
and things. For al Razi's alchemy see the works of J. Ruska (fuller bibliography in
Needham, Science and civilisation), esp. al Razi, Kitab sirr al asrar, trans. J. Ruska as
Ubersetzung und Bearbeitungen von al Razi's Buch Geheimnis der Geheimnisse (Berlin,
1935); and J. Ruska, 'Die Alchemie al Razi's', Der Islam, 22 (1935), pp. 28iff.

The New Cambridge History of Islam

with two people, the Umayyad prince Khalid ibn Yazid (d. 85/704), and the

alleged master of Jabir ibn Hayyan, the sixth Shi'ite imam, Ja'far al Sadiq
(d. 148/765). Associated with the disgruntled prince in the colourful tales
are
two Byzantine figures: Stephanus, a monk who is supposed to have
taught
him alchemy; and Morienus, a hermit with whom, so the tradition has it,
he
exchanged letters. Indeed, both Khalid and Ja'far were historical figures,
but
their involvement in alchemy is a pious fiction; the Khalid Morienus corre
spondence, though it had a great vogue in Europe after its Latin
translation in
De compositione alchimiae, is also apocryphal. 54 As for Jabir, a massive
alchem
ical corpus has been attributed to him, but he himself may never have
existed.
There is a similar case regarding the enigmatic Arabic text known only in
its
Latin translation, the Turba philosophorum, a symposium of ancient
alchemists
and pre Socratic Greek philosophers probably compiled around the end
of the
second/ninth century; the compiler is unknown. 55

Then, in the standard histories we encounter Dhu '1 Nun al Misri (d. 245/
860), the famous Sufi who is known for his mystical involvement in
alchemy;
and Ibn Umayl (d. c. 349/960), who loomed large in the Latin west as
Zadith
Senior Alius Hamuel, the author of the Tabula chemica, a widely
disseminated
alchemical poem in some ninety strophes derived directly from his
authentic
alMa 1 alwaraqi wa'lard alnujumiyya (Silvery water and starry earth) and
Risalat al shams ila'l hilal (Epistle of the sun to the crescent moon). 56 As
late
as the second half of the seventh/thirteenth century the alchemist Abu
'1 Qasim al 'Iraqi in his al l llm al muktasabfi zira'at al dhahab (Acquired
knowl
edge concerning the cultivation of gold), studied and edited by Holmyard,
57
could still draw inspiration from Ibn Umayl, and this shows continuity in
the
tradition. The thread runs to Aydamur aljildaki (fl. 743/1342), who com
mented upon al 'Iraqi and whose Nihayat al talab (End of the search)
shows,
in contrast to Ibn Umayl, a genuine spirit of experimental science. 58

54 See Ibn Khallikan, Kitab wafaydt al a'yan, trans. Baron de Slant, 4 vols. (Paris, 1842 71),
vol. I, p. 481.

55 Turba Philosophorum, trans. A. E. Waite as The 'Turba philosophorum', or 'Assembly of the
sages' (London, 1896); J. Ruska, 'Turba philosophorum, ein Beitrag zur Geschichte der
Alchimie', Quellen und Studien zur Geschiehte der Naturwissenschaft und der Medizin, 1

(1932)-

56 For an extensive bibliography see Needham, Science and civilisation, pp. 373, 401.

57 Abu '1 Qasim Muhammad ibn Ahmad al 'Iraqi, Kitab al Him al muktasab fi zira'at
al dhahab, trans. E. J. Holmyard (Paris, 1923).

58 M. Taslimi, 'An examination of the Nihayat al talab and the determination of its place
and value in the history of Islamic chemistry', inaugural dissertation, University of
London (1954).

652

Occult sciences and medicine

In this cluster we also have Maslama ibn Qasim al Qurtubi's Rutbat al hakim
(The sage's step), an outstanding work from the standpoint of chemical tech
nology. 59 In the fifth /eleventh century came the 'Ayn al san'a wa 'awn al sana'a
(Essence of the art and aid to the artisans) of al Salihi al Khwarizmi al Katf.
basically concerned with metallurgical chemistry, this treatise also figures in the

standard accounts of Islamic alchemy. ° From the following century, the time
when the translation of Arabic works into Latin saw its heyday, two writers of
alchemical poems appear in traditional histories: Abu Isma'il al Tughra'i, who
produced the aljawhar al nadir fi sina'at al iksir (Brilliant stone in the manufac
ture of elixir); * and Ibn Arfa' Ra's al Andalusi, the poet who called his verse
collection (diwari) Shudhur al dhahab (Particles of gold). 2 A little later, the
Damascene 'Abd al Rabim aljawbari (early seventh/thirteenth century) is also recognised by historians of alchemy. 63

Within this massive corpus there is a wildly diverse body of texts. Indeed, it
is sometimes difficult to see why all these writings are lumped together and
classified as 'alchemical', given the fundamental differences sometimes even
contradictory views and approaches found among them. A fresh taxonomy
is needed, especially if we are to move beyond mere descriptions in order to
provide fuller historical explanations. While this has yet to be done, a few taxonomic principles suggest themselves. For example, there are some authors in this corpus who wrote in terms that are allegorical, symbolic, esoteric, cryptic, and more speculative than practical (for instance, Ibn Umayl, al Tughra'i and al Iraqi); and this group is distinguishable from another that happens to be clear in its expressions, rationalistic, open, natural
istic, free of symbolism, espousing an approach we would call scientific (e.g.
Abu Bakr al Razi and the author(s) of much of the corpus Jabirianum); yet there
are some others who represent an ecstatic visionary mystical trend, far removed from the furnace and crucible (e.g. Dhu '1 Nun).

Then there exists a sizeable body of texts in this alchemical literature that
are unmistakably Aristotelian, working as they do within the tradition of Greek alchemy (e.g. the Turba); and an equally massive body far removed from Aristotle (e.g. most Jabirian writings) and overwhelmingly hermetic (e.g.

59 E.J. Holmyard, 'Maslama al Majritl and the Ruthat al hakim', Isis, 6 (1924), p. 293.

60 H. E. Stapleton and R. F. Azo, 'Alchemical equipment in the nth century', Memoirs of the
Asiatic Society of Bengal, 1 (1905).

61 F. R. Razuq, 'Studies on the works of al Tughraf, inaugural dissertation, University of
London (1963).

62 E.J. Holmyard, Alchemy (London, 1957), p. 100.

63 A. Mieli, La science arabe et son role dans revolution scientifique mondiale (Leiden, 1966),
p. 156.

653

The New Cambridge History of Islam

the Sirr of Pseudo Balrnas). Also, there are some Arabic 'alchemical' writings
belonging, rather, to chemical craft and metallurgy that is, works of proto
chemistry and not of alchemy, strictly speaking (e.g. the l Ayn al san L a); and
there are even those texts that deny the possibility of the transmutation of base
metals into gold denying, that is, what is considered the hallmark of alchemy
(for example, the Mukhtar of al Jawbari).

As it stands, this classification is crude and its categories are not mutually
exclusive, but even this kind of rough sorting is very helpful. To begin with,
the question arises as to why someone who teaches that turning base metals
into gold is an impossibility should be called an 'alchemist'. And why is

someone such as al Razi, whose theories, procedures and explanations are
all naturalistic, not a physicist or chemist, but rather an alchemist? This leads
to the fundamental question about alchemy itself: what is it?

As far as alchemy in Islam is concerned and by virtue of its transmission to
medieval Europe, this applies to Latin alchemy too one thing becomes clear
at the outset of this pursuit: that turning base metals into gold is neither a
necessary nor a fundamental concern of this alchemical tradition, as we know
this tradition from those who identified themselves as alchemists and whose
doctrines were substantively distinct from other discernible intellectual and
scientific currents of the culture. This is even more strongly true of Chinese
alchemy. 64

This is an appropriate point to turn to that huge body of writings that go
under the name of Jabir ibn Hayyan. 'Jabir', as it turns out, is the name not of
an individual but of a fraternity or fraternities of several generations of Shfite
oriented authors who in all probability lived between the third/ninth and
fourth/tenth centuries. While the question of Jabir' s historicity has remained
controversial, it seems more and more likely that there did exist some small
authentic core of texts written by a historically real Jabir living in the second/
eighth century, and from this core grew the extensive apocryphal corpus
Jabirianum which has come down to us. Indeed, the Jabirian corpus is so
diverse that it constitutes one of the most urgent cases requiring a taxonomic
treatment. And yet it does possess certain consistent features that define a
system and an alchemical school indeed, the alchemical school of Islam. This
is the school in which we find all of Islam's major contributions to chemistry:
the theory that all metals are composed of sulphur and mercury, a chemical
belief that led to the phlogiston theory of modern science; the introduction of

64 N. Sivin, 'Research on the history of Chinese alchemy', in Z. R. W. M. von Martels (ed.),
Alchemy revisited (Leiden, 1990).

654

Occult sciences and medicine

sal ammoniac in the repertoire of chemistry; and the use of plant and animal
substances in chemical procedures, something not found among the Greek
alchemists. 5 But more important, some of the metaphysical features of the
Jabirian system became a central part of the doctrines of Latin alchemists, still
influencing Robert Boyle in the seventeenth century.

Considering the Jabirian school as the epitome of Islamic alchemy, this
much can be said, albeit tentatively: the wide canvas of the ideas of both
Arabic and Latin alchemists shows an identifiable set of particulars that gives
them a distinctive identity in the respective histories of the two cultures.
These particulars have three fundamental elements: a cosmological doctrine
of the occultum and the manifestum (al batin and al zahir); a non Aristotelian
mechanistic physical theory of primary elements of bodies, namely natures
(tabaH'); and a hermetic epistemology. Alchemists in both traditions shared
these defining doctrines, which stood in contrast with other intellectual
scientific currents, in particular the Aristotelian Galenic current. One impli
cation of all this is that sheer chemical technology or metallurgical craft cannot
be considered alchemy; nor can alchemy be naively viewed as the prehistory
of our science of chemistry.

It is the Jabirian system wherein seem to lie the roots of both the alchemical
theory of the occult and the manifest, and the related cosmological system of
the natures. What is most interesting here is that all of this is intimately
connected to and operates within the framework of Shfrte sectarian politics
and theology. Indeed, the Jabirian corpus is as muchpart of the religio political
history of early Shfism as it is that of the history of Arabic science. The
metaphysics of the occultation of the imam and his messianic apparition; the
Isma'ili hiero history of the Prophet and the imam the Prophet being
the manifest (al zahir) speaking one (al natiq) who taught the outer meaning
of the Qur'an, and the imam the hidden (gha'ib), silent one (samit) who knew
the revealed text's occult meaning (batin); the chiliastic Shfite propaganda of
imminent apocalyptic events that would usher in a new era of just political
leaders and the related astrological predictions; all of this is closely intercon
nected with Jabir's cosmology and scientific theories.

Note the parallelism here: just as the imam is hidden from the eyes of the
common lot, so is one substance hidden (batin, occult) in another, which is

65 See note 52 above. See also Jabir ibn Hayyan, V elaboration de V elixir supreme: Quartorze
traites de Gabir ibn Hayyan sur le grand ceuvre alehimique, ed. P. Lory (Damascus, 1988).

66 P. M. Rattansi, 'The social interpretation of science in the seventeenth century', in
P. Mathias (ed.), Science and society, 1600 igoo (Cambridge, 1972), p. 132; A. J. Festugiere,
La revelation d'Hermes Trismegiste, 4 vols. (Paris, 1944 54).

manifest (zahir); and just as it requires privileged knowledge to recognise the
imam, esoteric alchemical knowledge is needed to recognise the hidden sub
stance. This privileged, esoteric epistemology is reinforced by the basic hermetic
principle that knowledge does not arise out of a process of logical reasoning
whereby innumerable particulars are subsumed under a few general principles,
as Aristotelians would have it, but that it is somehow 'given' or 'delivered':
knowledge is handed on by some supreme prophet or sage ('by my Master' is
the invocative formula found practically throughout the Jabirian corpus), or
brought through some kind of revelation, emerging in the mind as a clear idea,
or coming to pass by virtue of some intimate experience, or divulged to the
adept in the form of inscriptions on cave walls. As noted, this epistemological
principle is one of the identifying traits of Latin alchemy too, an essential
characteristic of Late Antique magic and the leitmotiv of Paracelsian
doctrine. 67

It is important to note the sharp contrast between Aristotle's famous four
qualities hot, cold, moist and dry and the Jabirian four natures (tabaY)
referred to by the same appellations. Aristotle's qualities distinguished in four
pairs the four primary Empedoclean elements of physical bodies, Air (hot
moist), Water (cold moist), Earth (cold dry) and Fire (hot dry). Jabir's
natures were the primary elements. The alchemist's natures, practically
never called by the Aristotelian terms dynameis (Ar. quwa, sing, quwwa) or
poiotetes (Ar. kayfiyya, sing, kayfiyyat), were independently existing corporeal
entities, occupying space, having weight, quantifiable, lending themselves to
being extracted out in isolation, and were found in mechanical and geometric
arrangements in different bodies. The qualities of the Greek philosopher,

which he never called natures (physeis), were 'forms'; they did not have an
independent corporeal existence; they were conceptual entities not to be found in actual isolation from the four elements in which they inhered. The
case with the physeies of Greek alchemists is similar: these too were incorpor
eal entities, conceived in terms of Aristotle's theory of potency and act, and
cannot be identified with Jabir's tabaY.

According to Jabirian doctrine all material bodies arose out of the combina
tion of the four natures occurring in innumerably different numerical relation
ships. Two of these natures were manifest {zahir) and two were occult (batin);
alchemical transmutation essentially consisted in changing the arithmetic pro
portions existing between them, but more particularly in extracting the occult
natures out (istikhraj). Thus, hidden in one metal was another such as gold
hidden in lead and the adept reverses this, making manifest what was occult.

67 Festugiere, La revelation, passim; Rattansi, 'Social interpretation', p. 11.

656

Occult sciences and medicine

In fact, this was effectively a mechanical process: transmutation was a kind of
'movement' (naql) of the natures.

It is this Jabirian zahir batin doctrine with its attendant mechanical system
of reified natures that was transmitted to the Latin alchemists. Indeed, the

occultum and the manifestum of these alchemists merged with their corpuscular
thinking over the centuries, eventually fusing with Paracelsian vitalism to
yield the theory that matter is composed of complex, layered corpuscles; Van
Helmont was a major exponent of this theory in the seventeenth century,
influencing the redoubtable scientist Robert Boyle. 9 It must give the historian
a pause that an alchemist, identified by Ibn Khaldun as 'the chief magician of
Islam', 70 would play such a sustained and direct role in the history of science
proper; and that the roots of our modern science would lie in some manner
also in ShTite sectarian metaphysics and politics.

Medicine: pluralism and the irony of incompatibilities

Abu Bakr al Razi (the Rhazes of the Latins) is one of the outstanding figures of
the history of medicine in Islam. But al Razi is equally as important as an
alchemist, and his case throws into sharp relief the question of the relationship
between medicine and occult sciences in Islamic culture. In general, Islamic
medicine has been identified with that predominantly Hippocratic tradition
elaborated and systematised by Galen and harmonised with Aristotelianism.
This became a powerful cultural and political institution in the world of Islam,
receiving patronage from rulers and nobles, operating in a secular humanistic
mode, establishing grand hospitals, and determining the course of medical
science and practice in Europe. 71 This picture is certainly legitimate, but it
remains oversimplified in that it obscures a number of complexities, for
example the fact that strains of medicine other than the Aristotelian Galenic
also existed in the Islamic milieu, and that these strains influenced the main
stream medical system in ways that are important.

68 For a detailed discussion see S. Nomanul Haq, 'Greek alchemy or Shfi metaphysics? A
preliminary statement concerning Jabir ibn Hayyan's zahir and batin', Bulletin of tfie

Royal Institute for Inter Faith Studies, 4 (Autumn /Winter 2002). See also S. Nomanul
Haq, 'TabiV, EI2, vol. X, pp. 25 8.

69 W. R. Newman, 'The occult and the manifest among the alchemists', in F.J. Ragep and
S. P. Ragep (eds.), Tradition, transmission, transformation (Leiden, 1996).

70 'Kabir al sahra': Ibn Khaldun, Muqaddima, p. 497.

71 For a rigorous general survey of Islamic medicine as constituting the pre history of the
modern science and practice of medicine see, for example, M. Ullmann, Islamic medicine
(Edinburgh, 1978).

657

The New Cambridge History of Islam

To begin with, Galen's own system was itself eclectic: in general physiology
and pathology he elaborated the famous Hippocratic doctrine of four humours; his anatomy came from the Alexandrians; pharmacology from Dioscorides; and in special physiology he drew upon Platonic, Stoic and Aristotelian ideas. This was all transmitted to the Arabs along with other Greek ideas; and then Syrian, Persian and Indian ideas were absorbed in Islam's medical culture, bringing with them some magical tendencies too, as
well as additional pharmacological data. 72 But the medical system into which
this complex was incorporated remained that of Galen a rational system with
its Aristotelian epistemological commitments whereby the specific and parti
cular was to be derived deductively by the general and the universal.

Two parallel traditions of medical thought and practice also existed in the

Islamic milieu, distinguished by their contrasting epistemological grounds that
can generically be described as hermetic. These were, first, the traditions of
occultism, and, second, that which became known as Prophetic medicine. It
ought to be noted that neither of these was in its main thrust superstitious or non
naturalistic, or based on the invocation of mysterious transcendental entities such
as devils or spirits. But despite their influence on the dominant Islamic Galenic
medicine, these two strains remained distinct, incompatible with the system of
Galenism, since they never affected its theoretical foundations and so never
became integral to it. There were important sociological and cultural historical
aspects to this. While al Razi was an exception for his times, until around the
seventh/thirteenth century those who studied and practised Galenic medicine
constituted by and large a social group different from the alchemists and
magicians, while those who were involved in Prophetic medicine were largely
theologians and religious traditionists who formed yet another separate com
munity. But this grouping had its own peculiar dynamics, and in later centuries
both social and intellectual boundaries began shifting, readjusting and blurring.

As an alchemist al Razi did not degenerate into irrationalism. Rather, he paid
attention to the specifics (khawass) rather than to the general; the former being a
defining hermetic feature of alchemy. This fed into the methodology of al Razi
the Galenic physician, and explains his intense preoccupation with individual
clinical cases, thousands of them, that led to his historical compilation, the Kitab
al hawi (Lat. Continens), an immense body of anatomically arranged medical
notes capped by his own clinical observations in a very large number of cases. 73
Again, it was from his study of specific instances empirically generalised that, for

72 Ibid., pp. 20 4.
73 Abu Bakr al Razi, Kitab al hawifi'l tibb, (Hyderabad, 1955 71), parts 1
23.

658

Occult sciences and medicine

example, al Razi was able to describe, for the first time in the history of
world
civilisation, the disease of smallpox, as distinguished from measles; and
to make
the discovery that the scent of roses can produce allergic cold or catarrh
74
Indeed, the Continens quotes Balrnas and his Kitab al tabiHyyat (The
book of
physics) as well as a similar work attributed to Hermes. 75

It should be reiterated that when al Razi speaks of what have been called
'magical' cures, he does not deem symbols to be causes; rather, he still
remains thoroughly naturalistic in his explanations. Such cures are
'magical'
only in the sense that no general principles are offered to explain them,
and
that they sound far fetched, such as prescribing the application of a
squashed
scorpion to heal scorpion sting wounds, or applying the burnt hair of a
woman
to control bleeding. But mystery is not an irrational principle of
explanation
for al Razi, and he espouses the idea that unexplained phenomena and
wonders exist in nature that cannot be rejected merely because no
theoretical
generalisations are at hand to account for them. Therefore his work is an
example of how Galenic medicine and occultism, while remaining
epistemo
logically incompatible, have nevertheless fruitfully mingled.

Before examining the similar case of Prophetic medicine, one important

observation must be made here. Al Razi's alchemical attitude takes him to the
point where he exposes the theoretical foundations of Galenism to the danger of
empirical destruction. The notion that the body is warmed or cooled only by
warmer or cooler bodies is central to the system of humours; al Razi rejects this
on grounds of specific clinically observed cases. A warm drink, he points out,
sometimes heats the body to a degree hotter than itself; and this means that the
drink triggers a response in the body rather than mechanically communicating its
own warmth or cold. This kind of criticism threatens to bring down and over
time it did the whole theory of humours and the four elements on which it was
based/ 6 But al Razi did not go quite so far in Islamic culture, the alchemical
approach did not make theoretical inroads into the Galenic medical system.

Prophetic medicine (al tibb al nabawT), the other parallel tradition in this
culture of what has appropriately been described as medical pluralism, 77 is
also an eclectic system, incorporating traditional Arabian folk medicine,

74 Ullmann, Islamic medicine, pp. 82 5.

75 Ibid., pp. 108 9.

76 See particularly Razi's Shukuk 'alajaltnus (Doubts concerning Galen); the observation is
made by L. E. Goodman, 'al Razf, E72, vol. VIII, pp. 474 7.

77 Cf. L. Conrad, 'Medicine', in J. L. Esposito (ed.), The Oxford encyclopedia of the modem
Islamic world (New York, 1995); L. Conrad, 'Arab Islamic Medicine', in W. F. Bynum and
R. Porter (eds.), Companion encyclopedia of the history of medicine (London, 1993).

including an extensive materia medica, naturalistic Qur'anic teachings and,
later on, all kinds of borrowings from Galenic medicine: all of this centred
around the figure of the Prophet. A large number of medically relevant
statements and actions attributed to him became part of the large compendia
of hadiths that typically contain a separate book on medicine, and then these
medical sections began to be compiled independently. After admitting a good
deal of diverse additions the genre reached its maturity in the eighth/four
teenth century, when two classic works appeared in the field, both with the
title al Tibb al nabawi (Prophetic medicine) one by the Shafi'ite theologian
and historian Abu c Abd Allah Muhammad al Dhahabi (d. 748/1348), the other
by Ibn Qayyim aljawziyya (d. 751/1350), a Hanbali jurist and student of the
famous theologian Ibn Taymiyya/ 8

This tradition, which has hardly been studied, did not exist in a combative
relationship with Galenic medicine; nor was it, in its general thrust, a 'magical'
or animistic system of rites involving invocations of transcendental beings.
What we find is largely a formulary of naturalistic traditional remedies, along
with rules of hygiene, disease prevention and dietetics. In general, all of this
was presented without any theories, and the small number of 'magical'
remedies that do exist in this tradition seem, by and large, to be such only
in the sense that some of al Razi's remedies are 'magical' far fetched and ad
hoc, but not non naturalistic.

Prophetic medicine showed a great predilection for simple medicines

(mufradat) as against compound ones (aqrabadhin, from the Greek graphidion)
and this provided a tremendous impetus to the scientific discipline of pharma
cology or materia medica, a field much more developed in Islam than among
the Greeks and regarded by many modern historians as the main contribution
of the Islamic civilisation to medicine. 79 The tradition does invoke the curative
powers of Qur'anic verses and of the efficacy of prayers and invocation of
God; but again this is explained in rational psychological terms as providing
strength and a vehicle to the will of the patient for recovery. ° Ibn Khaldun,

78 al Dhahabi, al Tibb al nabawi (Cairo, 1961); Ibn Qayyim aljawziyya, al Tibb al nabawi
(Cairo, 1978). For seminal work in the field see L. Conrad, The Western medical tradition,
800 BC 1S00 AD (Cambridge, 1995); F. Rahman, Health and medicine in the Islamic tradition
(New York, 1987); and A. Newman, 'Tasrih i Mansuri: Human anatomy between the
Galenic and Prophetic traditions', in Z. Vesel et al. (eds.), La science dans le moderne
Iranien (Tehran, 1998).

79 Rahman, Health and medicine, p. 52.

80 See Rahman, 'The Prophetic medicine' in ibid., pp. 41 58, where he gives extensive
primary source citations.

Occult sciences and medicine

too, rationalist as he was, admitted the psychological benefits of all this,

despite his lack of enthusiasm for this whole tradition.

Nor does Prophetic medicine embody a retrogressive or reactionary reli
gious movement; and this is an observation that has far reaching
consequen
ces for the social and political history of Islam. Thus, it would appear to
us
daringly progressive and most surprising, for example, that al Dhahabi, a
protege of the notoriously strict theologian Ibn Taymiyya, considered it
legitimate for women not only to treat men and vice versa, but also for
them to examine each other's sexual organs. The same liberal view is
reported
of the most 'orthodox' of all founders of Islamic legal schools, Ahmad ibn
Hanbal (d. 241/855). But further, we see a similar relaxed attitude with
regard
to music not only on the part of al Dhahabi but also on that of one of the
earliest compilers of Prophetic medicine, the fourth/tenth century
theologian
Abu Nu'aym. Music repels diseases and beautifies the body, they say
without
trepidation.

The difference between the mainstream Galenic medical tradition and
Prophetic medicine lies in their incompatible philosophical commitments
and their differing motives and social contexts. While Galenism espoused
a
Hellenistic Aristotelian epistemology, those theologians who laid the
founda
tions of Prophetic medicine were committed to what I have called a
hermetic
principle of knowledge more specifically, the principle that knowledge is
something that is 'delivered' by a prophet, to whom it is 'revealed' by
God;
and this is grounded on the theological doctrine that ultimate causation
lies
with God. The motives were different too: Hellenised Galenic physicians
were in fact practitioners of medicine, quite often in metropolitan
hospitals
(bimaristans) that competed for prestige and royal patronage, and they
had
scientific and career ambitions. Compilers in the Prophetic medicine
genre, on
the other hand, were theologians and religious leaders, not practising
physi
cians. What motivated them was a sense of religious duty pro bono
publico; they
were trying to claim medicine for Islam, emphasising the integrity of the
human person who not only had a body (jisni) but also spirit (ruh) and
soul

(nafs) and they aimed at providing the general populace with easy access to
curative and preventive measures given a general shortage of physicians in
Islamic societies. A good example of this spirit is the Tashil al manafi 1 (Medical

81 Ibn Khaldun, Muqaddima, pp. 493 4; Ibn Khaldun, Muqaddima, trans. Rosenthal, vol. Ill,
pp. 148 51.

82 Rahman, Health and medicine, pp. 55 8.

661

benefits made easy) of the ninth/fifteenth century writer Abd al Rahman al
Azraq, who also complains of the shortage of physicians. 3

Again, and this might strike one as ironic, Prophetic medicine created a
highly progressive religious attitude to medicine in general, and this proved
favourable to scientific medicine. For example, one finds quoted all over the
place sayings of the Prophet to the effect that there is no science nobler than
medicine after the science of sacred law. Then al Ghazali, who has been
portrayed as the opponent of the scientific spirit in Islam due to his criticism
of the metaphysical underpinnings of certain of the Greek sciences, considered
anatomy and medicine praiseworthy (mahmud) sciences, and he lamented that
Muslims were neglecting them, and wrote on anatomy himself; his writings
were in fact a source of powerful encouragement to the medical sciences. 84 It

is important to note that the writers of manuals of Prophetic medicine were
not thereby involved in any commercial enterprise; nor, for about 500 years
after Greek medicine took root in Islamic societies, did they receive any court
patronage for this work.

But patronage was crucial to Galenic medicine, which remained the over
powering and official medical tradition in Islam. The 'Abbasid caliphs, in
emulation of their Sasanid predecessors, considered it a source of imperial
glory and prestige to build and patronise through endowments (waqfs)
increasingly elaborate hospitals, and to have prominent physicians among
their courtiers and royal personnel, such as the Christian physician Jabra'il
ibn Bakhtishu' who was attached to the caliphal court of al Mansur (r. 136 58/
754 75) and Harun al Rashid (r. 170 93/786 809). Michael Dols has written of a
number of interest groups in early 'Abbasid times struggling for medical
authority and domination. Eastern Christian doctors promoted Greek medi
cine and did win in the end, with the Syriac set of mainly Galenic works
Summaria Alexandrinorum (JawdmV al Iskandaraniyyiri) becoming the founda
tion of the Islamic curriculum. 85 According to the standard accounts that
certainly need further investigation, the following picture emerges: the first
hospital in Baghdad was set up by Ibn Bakhtishu', and in quick succession
hospitals were founded by other Christians. Thus, Abu 'Uthman al Dimashqi

'Abd al Rahman al Azraq, Tashil al manaft (Cairo, 1963), pp. 3 4. For the question of this

shortage see R. Murphy, 'Ottoman medicine and transculturalism from the sixteenth

through the eighteenth century', Bulletin of the History of Medicine, 66 (1992).

For al Ghazali in particular see E. Savage Smith, Attitudes toward dissection in medi

eval Islam', Journal of the History of Medicine and Allied Sciences, 50 (1995), pp. 94 7.

M. W. Dols, 'The origins of the Islamic hospital: Myth and reality', Bulletin of the History

of Medicine, 61 (1987).

662

Occult sciences and medicine

headed a bimaristan founded in 302/914 by a vizier of the caliph al Muqtadir
(r. 295 320/908 32); then, the caliph's medical advisor Sinan ibn Thabit, a Sabian Galenic physician, succeeded al Dimashqi, himself establishing a new
hospital for the ruler. Ibn BakhashiT's hospital was later directed by the Persian Christian physician Yuhanna ibn Masawayh (d. 243/857).

Later on, while we hear of fewer Christian names, largely due to conversions,
hospitals continued to be founded, standing as monuments of royal patronage,
and even sometimes of dynastic opulence. Performing both patient treatment
and teaching functions, they remained secular public welfare institutions in
which the state had a direct role, and they produced a large number of very
important trained doctors. Indeed, the hospital stands out as one of the greatest
contributions of Islam to the medical sciences and health care. But not all great
figures in the history of official Islamic medicine, which seems to have been
state regulated by a licensing procedure, were trained in hospitals. And yet
almost all of them were dependent on the patronage of a local or grand ruler.

Rabban al Tabari, whose Fir daws al hikma (Paradise of wisdom) is one of the
first Arabic compendia of medicine, was a secretary of a prince in Tabaristan,
and dedicated his well known work to the Abbasid caliph al Mutawakkil (r. 232
47/847 61); Ibn Masawayh was a personal physician to the caliphs al Ma'mun (r.
198 218/813 33), al Mu'tasim (r. 218 27/833 42), al Wathiq (r. 227 32/842 7) and
al Mutawakkil; Ibn Masawayh' s pupil Hunayn ibn Ishaq, the leading translator
of Greek and Syriac works into Arabic and a medical writer whose own work on
ophthalmology was ground breaking, also served the Abbasid caliphs; Abu
Bakr al Razi was formally involved in Abbasid blmaristans and served the Samanid prince Mansur ibn Ishaq, to whom he dedicated his Kitab al Mansuri;
a part of this work was translated as Liber nanus and later worked on by a figure
no less than Andreas Vesalius.

In the western Islamic lands the outstanding surgeon of Cordoba Abu al Qasim al Zahrawi served at the court of the caliph [Abd al Rahman III (r. 300
50 / 912 61). In Transoxania and the Central Asian regions we have the example
of the supreme figure of Ibn Sina (Lat. Avicenna) whose al Qanun (The canon)
remained one of the basic reference works in the European medical world
well into the sixteenth century: not only did he serve the ruler of Bukhara, he
also became directly involved in court politics, moving from place to place,
and eventually in Hamadhan he became vizier of the Buyid ruler Shams al
Dawla Abu Tahir (r. 387 412/997 1021).

In comparative history, it has been proposed that the European Renaissance arose in part as a reaction to scholasticism; but in Islam events
followed a reverse order a 'renaissance' came first and a kind of

663

'scholasticism' followed. We see this clearly in the history of medicine in
Islam. Until around the seventh/thirteenth century medical education
was
largely the prerogative of individual Hellenised philosopher physician
teach
ers, who sometimes taught in hospitals under state sponsorship,
sometimes
privately; also, medical study was sometimes carried out within the
family,
whereby a physician's father taught his own sons and daughters; while
some
physicians, such as Ibn Sina, were self taught. All of this went on in a
secular
framework outside the madrasas, the well known private prototypical reli
gious institutions. 7 But in the fifth/ eleventh century Nizam al Mulk, the
'wise' minister of Turk Saljuq rulers, began to establish state sponsored
madrasas. They multiplied, and the teaching of medical sciences
gradually
became a part of their curricula.

The famous Mustansiriyya madrasa, surviving until our own times, was
founded in the seventh/thirteenth century by the 'Abbasid caliph
Mustansir
Bi'llah. In about 632/1234 it opened a medical section with its own
separate
building. In Central Asia madrasas flourished under Timurid patronage
during
the late eighth/fourteenth and early ninth/fifteenth centuries; many of
them
taught natural and mathematical sciences, including medicine. In the
seventh/
thirteenth century at the Ilkhanid court a new and happy relationship
devel
oped between, on the one hand, the religious sciences, the disciplines
ofkalam
andfiqh being typically most prominent among them, and, on the other,
what
were known as the 'ancient sciences', those traditionally studied by the
Hellenised philosophers, including Galenic medicine. Moreover, in the

ninth/fifteenth century the Ottoman sultan Mehmed the Conqueror built in
Istanbul a madrasa that specialised in both the religious and the natural
sciences; scientific medicine was an integral part of the latter. Two leading
figures both worked in hospitals and taught in madrasas: Ibn Abi Usaybi'a
(d. 668/1270), whose Tabaqat al atibba' (Classes of physicians) has served us as
one of the fundamental primary sources for Islam's medical history; and his
teacher Ibn Baytar (d. 646/1248), considered to be the greatest Muslim botanist. 89

86 A. I. Sabra, 'Situating Arabic science: Locality versus essence', Isis, 87 (1996), p. 662.

87 See G. Leiser's somewhat dated but comprehensive 'Medical education in Islamic lands
from the seventh to the fourteenth century', Journal of the History of Medicine and Allied
Sciences, 38 (1983).

88 See S. Carboni and L. Komaroff (eds.), The legacy of Genghis Khan: Courtly art and culture
in western Asia 1256 13% (New Haven, 2002).

89 Here drawing heavily upon Sonja Brentjes' both published and unpublished recent
works on madrasas, including 'The location of ancient or "rational" sciences in Muslim
educational landscapes', Bulletin of the Royal Institute for Inter Faith Studies, 4 (2002).

664

Occult sciences and medicine

In fact, the seventh/thirteenth century was the time when the jurist

physician replaced the traditional philosopher physician, and there was a
productive interaction between the religious sciences and their alleged
adver
sary, the ancient sciences. The interaction is complex in the sense that it
becomes more and more difficult from this time to tell which discipline
includes what subjects: thus Euclid's Elements are sometimes found to be
part of kalatn, and logic and arithmetic included in usul al din (principles
of
religion). This was also the time when boundaries between Galenic and
Prophetic medicine become blurred, and it is no longer clear which
tradition
medical writers were working in. The interaction was productive:
sciences
made great strides during this period. It is at this time that the some of
the
ground breaking scientific work in Islam was accomplished.

In the medical sciences we have the case of Ibn Nafis (d. 687/1288), a
Shan't
jurist theologian, but also a prominent figure in the history of scientific
medicine. Historians know that, in the course of his commentary on Ibn
Sina's Qanun, Ibn Nafis had announced his important discovery of the
pulmo
nary circulation of blood. This ushered in a new era in the science of
human
anatomy and physiology, and marked a fundamental and fateful break
with
Galenism. In Galenic physiology blood was thought to be perpetually gen
erated in the liver, moving from the right ventricle of the heart to the left
through a passage in the septum this passage was problematic. It
haunted the
great William Harvey, and was not settled until 1661, when Marcello
Malpighi
saw through the microscope the capillaries in the lungs and bladder of
frogs.
'There is no passage between the two,' Ibn Nafis had said categorically,
'dissection (tashrih) refutes [this], for the septum between the two
ventricles
is much thicker than elsewhere.' 90 Did Ibn Nafis, the Shan't jurist,
perform
human dissection? The possibility cannot be ruled out. 91

Somewhat later we have another example of the fruitful blending of the
two traditions and attitudes of Prophetic and Galenic medicines. This is
the
case of the Tashrih i Mansiiri of Ibn Ilyas, a Persian language treatise on
anatomy which presents for the first time in the Islamic world a full page
scientific anatomical illustration of a pregnant woman. This text,
completed in

798/1396 and dedicated to Timur's grandson and ruler of Fars, Muhammad
Bahadur Khan, is based as much on Prophetic medicine as it is on the Galenic

90 Ibn Nafis, Kitab shark tashrih al qanun, ed. S. Qatayah and B. Ghaliyunji (Cairo, 1988),
p. 388.

91 For a learned work on the question of dissection in Islam see Savage Smith, 'Attitudes
toward dissection'.

tradition. In fact, in his discussion of conception and foetal development a
question of legal value in connection with the issue of foeticide Ibn Ilyas shows a preference for the evidence from the hadith, as well as a heavy dependence on the Prophetic medicine compilers such as al Dhahabi and Ibn Qayyim aljawziyya; he completely ignores the arguments offered by Galen and Ibn Sina. Both al Dhahabi and Ibn Qayyim had discussed anatomy,
citing the Qur'an and hadith as well as the scientific theories of Aristotle, Galen, Hippocrates, Ibn STna and al RazI Again, in support of his view that the
shortest possible period of human pregnancy is six months, Ibn Ilyas first cites
the Qur'an Q 46:15; 2:233 and only then the conclusion of Ibn Sina. 92

In India a third element entered Islamic medicine, where it still survives today as yimarii tibb, with its practitioners referred to as hakims (sages). It
derived from local Indian medical systems. The bulk of the Islamic medicine
literature produced in India is in Persian, which became the chief vehicle for

these writings from the late eighth/ fourteenth century onwards. In the history
of this sort of medicine we find many names and titles from Persianate
regions from Rayy the Khuldsat al tajrib (Quintessence of experiment) of
Ibn Nur Baksh al RazI, completed in 907/i50if., 93 and Risala i mujarrabat
(Treatise on tested curatives) of Ibn Mas c ud of Shiraz (tenth/ sixteenth cen
tury) 94 are among them; mujarrabat compilations were then established as a
new genre. But from the second half of the tenth/sixteenth century one has to
look to Mughal India.

It is reported that one Bhuva Khavasskhan complained to the Lodhi sultan
Sikandar that Greek medicine was not suitable for Indians, and sought royal
blessings for a medical compilation in Persian based on Sanskrit sources.
Blessings were granted, and the result was the Ma'dan al shifa' (Treasure of
healing) completed in 918/1512. This book has enjoyed tremendous authority
in Indian Muslim medicine ever since. We have numerous instances of the
incorporation, in fact almost complete absorption, of Indian material into a
melange in which the determining element was the Galenic Prophetic tradi
tion. Thus, Qasim Hindushah in the eleventh/ seventeenth century wrote his
highly influential work on therapeutics, the Dastur al atibba' (Memorandum
for physicians), which combined Islamic and Indian elements. The same was
true of the many works of Muhammad Akbar Arzarii who wrote several works

92 See Newman, 'Tasrih i Mansuri', pp. 262 71.

93 A. Fonahn, Zur Quellenkunde der persisehen Medizin (Leipzig, 1910), no. 28; F. Tauer,
'Persian learned literature from its beginning to the end of the eighteenth century', in
K. Jahn (ed.), History of Iranian literature (Dordrecht, 1968), p. 474.

94 Fonahn, Quellenkunde, no. 167; Tauer, 'Persian learned literature', p. 474.

666

Occult sciences and medicine

for Aurangzeb, including a mujarrabat treatise. 95 In the Mughal period med
icine was in general taught in the madrasas. Given this, almost all religious
scholars were also well versed in medicine.

But a fundamental shift was under way. In the eleventh /seventeenth
century Salih ibn Nasr Allah, the physician to the Ottoman sultan Mehmed
IV, produced his Ghayat al itqan fi tadbir badan al insan (Aim of the greatest
perfection in the treatment of the human body): this work not only described
hitherto unidentified illnesses, but also introduced a new system of medicine
the chemical medicine of Paracelsus. The Galenic humoral pathology was
abandoned in favour of the theory of three basic substances sulphur,
mercury and salt and therapy was carried out by means of the philosopher's
stone. 96 Ironically, the Paracelsian system, as noted, was itself directly infiu
enced by the Arabic alchemical tradition. So in a complex manner Ibn Nasr
Allah was in part reconnecting the Islamic world to its own scientific roots, but
reaching it through the intermediary of European learning, which had trans
formed it, and in many cases transcended it.

In the eleventh/ seventeenth and twelfth/eighteenth centuries a whole
body of Paracelsian oriented medical work appeared in the Ottoman empire,
referred to as tibb ijadid (new medicine): this included a highly elaborate work

by one Shifa] i (d. c. 1155/ 1742), as well as translations of the Dutch medical
figure Herman Boerhaave's (d. 1738) writings; discussions on the merits of the
'old' and 'new' were also feverishly conducted during this period. Concerned
about the toxic effects of some of the new medications administered, the
sultan, Ahmed III (r. 1115 43/1703 30) issued a decree to prevent this practice.
The decree opens with the following announcement:

Some charlatan European doctors left the school of the old medicine, and
administering some drugs under the name of new medicine harmed some
patients. Mehmet, the convert, and his partner, a European doctor, who had
started an office at Adrianople were expelled from the city! 97

We are now entering a time in which Islam finds itself in a world both
intellectually and politically controlled and constructed by a rapidly ascending
modern Europe; but that is another story. 98

95 Tauer, 'Persian learned literature', pp. 474 5.

96 Ullmann, Islamic medicine, p. 50.

97 N. Sari and B. Zulfikar, 'The Paracelsusian [sic] influence on Ottoman medicine in the
seventeenth and eighteenth centuries', in E. Ihsanoglu (ed.), Transfer of modern science
and technology to the Muslim world (Istanbul, 1992).

98 Murphy, 'Ottoman medicine', p. 379; Ullmann, Islamic medicine, p. 51.

667

24

Literary and oral cultures

JONATHAN BLOOM

A most distinctive feature of Arabic is the coexistence of a relatively uniform
written language, read by a great number of people from Morocco to Malaysia
and by literate Muslims throughout the world, alongside several divergent
and mutually unintelligible dialects, spoken in significant but smaller regions
between the Atlantic coast of northern Africa and the Arabian Sea. Many
individuals may speak a dialect at home while learning at school to read, write,
speak and understand Modern Standard Arabic (Ar. fusha), an elevated lan
guage used for speeches, lectures, newspapers, literature and radio and tele
vision broadcasts throughout the Arab world. 1 The coexistence of written and
spoken forms of the language appears to be as old as Arabic itself, and has led
to the emergence and perpetuation of distinct literary and oral cultures.

Like other Semitic languages Arabic relies on verbal roots, usually com
posed of three (sometimes four) phonemes. While some words are shared
between the elevated language and the various colloquials, many differences
in vocabulary and grammar distinguish them. The most important is syntax:
the elevated language normally uses verb/subject/object word order, with
grammatical function indicated by conjugated verbs and inflected nouns,
whereas the colloquials normally use subject/verb/object word order and
reduce conjugations and inflections to a minimum. In actual practice the
regional dialects may blend into the literary language, yet fusha still remains
virtually the only acceptable vehicle for written communication throughout
the Arabic speaking world. This elevated and highly inflected language is
virtually identical in structure with the language of the Qur'an, revealed
some fourteen centuries ago. This fact underscores not only the long and
deep relationship between the Arabic language and Islam, but also the

i Ten DeYoung, Arabic language and Middle East/North African language studies',
available at www.indiana.edu/~arabic/arabic history.htm, accessed September 2004.

668

Literary and oral cultures

fundamental role of the Qur'an for understanding the relationship between
literary and oral cultures in Islamic civilisations.

The pre-Islamic period

Oral culture is, by its very nature, transient, and hence the story of the relation
ship between orality and writing has to be constructed largely from secondary
sources, many of which were committed to writing long after the period to
which they refer. Scattered evidence shows that different oral and written forms
of discourse have characterised the Arabic language since its emergence in
central and northern Arabia during the early centuries of the Common Era.
Speakers surely had poems and stories, but their literature appears to have been
composed, transmitted and preserved by oral means alone.

Of the several forms of oral literature thought to have existed in pre Islamic
Arabia, only some poems and stories have survived. 2 The most famous is a
corpus of poems probably composed by the late sixth century CE but only
transcribed in the second/ eighth century or later. The poems show that a
distinct poetic idiom had emerged in the Arabian Peninsula by the coming of

Islam. Despite some differences in vocabulary and pronunciation, this poetic
language was practically uniform throughout Arabia. Poems were usually
short and were composed to be recited in public, either by the poet or by a
professional reciter, who might add his own details and background. Because
transmitters constantly reworked and embellished poems, no single 'authen
tic' version of a particular work existed. Poetry was composed mentally,
without the aid of writing, and the professional reciter relied on his prodigious
memory when performing.

The earliest Arabic writings are simple graffiti, funerary inscriptions and the
like. Later sources indicate that writing was also used in pre Islamic Arabic for
contracts, treaties, letters etc., although none has survived. By the fourth
century CE some writers of Arabic used the Nabataean script, to judge from
the Namara inscription of 328 CE, which records the burial place of the second
Lakhmid king, Imru' al Qays. 3 Although the language is virtually identical to
that known from the Qur'an, the script has not yet assumed its later form,
which was deeply indebted to Syriac script. The rhetoric and layout of the
Namara inscription indicate that it was neither a transcription of everyday

2 Alan Jones, 'Orality and writing in Arabia', in Jane Dammen McAuliffe (ed.),
Encyclopaedia of the Qur'an, 5 vols. (Leiden, 2001 6), vol. Ill, pp. 587 93.

3 James A. Bellamy, 'A new reading of the Namarah inscription', JAOS, 105, 1 (1985).

669

speech nor a mere graffito. Although no earlier examples have yet been found,
it cannot have been a first effort.

Arabic, like most Semitic scripts, is written from right to left and based on
an abjad (consonantary) rather than a true alphabet, for it uses one symbol per
consonantal phoneme. Since Arabic had more phonemes than Nabataean,
some of the letters had to represent more than one consonant. By the seventh
century CE diacritical marks over or under the letters distinguished those with
a similar shape, such as ba\ td' and tha' or ha\jim and kha'. Arabic also lacks
symbols for vowels because the morphemic structure of the language makes
them redundant. Eventually, however, it came to use 'helping' consonants to
represent the long vowels and other signs for short vowels in fully vocalised
texts. Arabic script, furthermore, has no separate monumental and cursive
forms: it requires that some letters always be joined to or separated from
others. Each of the twenty eight letters, therefore, has the potential to have a
slightly different shape depending on where it stands in a word or fragment:
independent, initial, medial or final.

These complexities indicate that Arabic writing must have had a limited
audience: although some individuals might have used writing for personal
ends, in general only special texts were committed to writing in order to
confer authenticity, a special status that would have been particularly impor
tant for such documents as treaties and contracts. 4 Arabic writing was meant
to be read only by readers who already had a good idea of what a given text
would say; conversely, writing was not intended to convey new information
to the uninitiated.

Orality and writing in early Islam

Islam dramatically propelled Arabic to new roles in world affairs. According to
Muslim tradition the Prophet Muhammad received God's revelations in the
early seventh century CE. They were initially understood to be oral texts
meant to be meticulously rehearsed and recited as God's revealed word, for
Qur'an (or Koran, from the Arabic qufan), the name by which they are known
in Arabic, literally means 'recitation'. The first verses revealed (Q 96, 'The
embryo') begin with the command to 'Recite in the name of your lord who
created /Created the human from an embryo. /Recite.' Other revelations
beginning with the command to 'Say!' further underscore its verbal nature.
Muhammad initially repeated the revelations to his followers, who rehearsed

4 Gregor Schoeler, Ecrire et transmettre dans le debut de Vislam (Paris, 2002), p. 17.

Literary and oral cultures

and recited them in turn, thereby disseminating the divinely inspired text by
the same long established traditions used for reciting and memorising Arabic
poetry. The Qur'an, however, established a new standard of oral and literary
excellence for the Arabic language.

Muslims conceive of the Qur'an not as a physical book like the Torah or the
Gospels but as a recitation in Arabic (qufan L arabiy; see Q 12:2; 20:113); this

concept has provided powerful impetus to the widespread memorisation of
the Arabic text and its artful and reverent recitation. 5 Recitation became the
backbone of Muslim education, and innumerable anecdotes recount how
Muslims learned the Qur'an orally. For example, the Abbasid caliph Harun
al Rashid (r. 170 93/786 809) made his son al Ma'mun recite for the great
scholar al Kisa'I. While al Ma'mun recited, al Kisal sat listening until al
Ma'mun made a mistake, whereupon the scholar raised his head and the
young man corrected himself 6 In the 1940s the Moroccan sociologist Fatima
Mernissi learned the Qur'an from her aunt in much the same way. 7

The language of the Qur'an appears to lie somewhere between the standard
poetical idiom of pre Islamic poetry and the spoken dialect of the Hijaz. 8
When Arab grammarians began work in the second/ eighth century they
intended to create only a descriptive grammar, but they actually developed
a prescriptive one in which all conflicting variants were deemed substandard.
The principles they established were taken to be normative and correct for the
formal language, and remain the basis of language teaching throughout the
Arabic speaking world. In short, classical Arabic is the only classical language
still in current use. As Muslims carried Islam from Arabia, Arabic became the
language of religion and administration everywhere. Every believer came to
learn part or all of the Qur'an by heart and to develop some competence in
Arabic, for it allowed one not only to practise one's religion but also to
negotiate within the society framed by that religion. The Qur'an' s incompa
rable prestige crystallised the written and elevated form of Arabic as a literary
model.

Memorisation of the Qur'an has always been an accomplishment of great
pride and status among Muslims. The htifiz (f. hafiza; one who 'knows by
heart') might be young or old, male or female, a layperson or a scholar. The
great Persian poet Shams al Din Muhammad Shirazi (726 91/1326 89), for

5 Jones, 'Orality'.

6 Johannes Pedersen, The Arabic booh With an introduction fry Robert Hillenbrand, trans.
Geoffrey French (Princeton, 1984), p. 28.

7 Fatima Mernissi, Dreams of trespass: Tales of a harem girlhood (Reading, MA, 1995), p. 96.

8 C. Rabin et al. ''Arabiyya', Eh, vol. I, p. 565.

671

The New Cambridge History of Islam

example, received a classical Islamic education and had memorised the Qur'an
by an early age. This feat earned him the sobriquet Hafiz by which he is universally known and revered. In all Islamic societies memorising the Qur'an
was assumed to be a prerequisite for higher learning. 9 Memorisation of the
Qur'an also created an environment in which orality and memorisation played
a critical role in the creation and transmission of knowledge. Consequently the
training of memory was a constant feature of medieval Islamic education.

Human memory, however, is not always infallible, so already in Muhammad's lifetime some of the revelations were transcribed on whatever
writing materials were available at that time in western Arabia. Muslim tradition generally accepts that Muhammad was illiterate, although his early
career as a long distance merchant would have made some knowledge of writing and reading useful, if not essential. Nevertheless, it is unlikely that
Muhammad would himself have transcribed the revelations; he is said to have

dictated some of them, particularly as they grew longer and more numerous,
but these writings were considered only memory aids for the believers, not
scripture. 10

The need to guarantee and preserve an unequivocal text of the revelations
soon led to their codification, and this in turn led to the codification of written
Arabic, a system that has remained remarkably consistent over the ensuing
fourteen centuries. Justification was found in the pivotal role writing played in
the revelation, transmission and experience of the Qur'an. Although the first
verses revealed to Muhammad begin with the command to recite, the same
verses continue with the observation that 'Your lord is all giving/ Who taught
by the pen (qalam)/ Taught the human what he did not know before.' One of
several Qur'anic metaphors involving writing and written texts (e.g. the word
lawk, 'tablet', occurs five times), this verse underscores the primacy of writing
as that which distinguishes man from God's other creations. 11 Although
theologians and others may debate the exact meaning of this and other verses,
from the start writing was accorded unusually high prestige in the Islamic
scheme of things.

The first caliph, Abu Bakr, ordered all the revelations to be collected and
transcribed on sheets; this collection is said to have passed to his successor
'Urnar and then to his daughter Hafsa, underscoring the essentially private
nature of this initial compilation. The third caliph, 'Uthman (r. 23 35/644 56),

9 William A. Graham, Beyond the written word: Oral aspects of scripture in the history of
religion (New York, 1993), pp. 105 6.

10 Schoeler, Ecrire et transmettre, p. 31.

11 A.J. Wensinck and C. E. Bosworth, 'Lawh', Eh, vol. V, p. 698.

Literary and oral cultures

ordered an official recension and sent copies to the provincial capitals, where
they served as exemplars of reference. 12 The earliest evidence for the con
sonantal text of the Qur'an is the inscription inside the Dome of the Rock in
Jerusalem (72/692). Diacritical points distinguish some words with similar
forms (e.g. c flM from Hnda), yet despite these aids to legibility, the ability to
decode a written text remained a very specialised skill. 13 Of course, those who
had memorised the Qur'an or parts of it might need only recognise one group
of letters to 'read' the text of an entire inscription.

A fully vocalised text of the Qur'an was only established in the early fourth/
tenth century. 14 Because 'Uthman's recension lacked diacritical marks and
short vowels, manuscripts provided only guidance to readers, who learned by
oral transmission. 15 From the second/ eighth century seven traditions of 'read
ers' (Ar. qari\ actually reciter) developed slightly different vocalisations of the
text. By the fourth/ tenth century these had been codified as canonical 'read
ings' (qira'at). 1 Thenceforth 'readers' had to keep to the canonical 'readings',
and manuscripts increasingly indicated the 'correct' vocalisation of the text
according to one of these systems.

Qur'an recitation thereby became a distinct theological discipline with
many practitioners. Teachers would recite the text, indicating correct pronun

ciation and explaining difficult passages, while students memorised verses and

their interpretation. By the mid second/ eighth century they had probably begun to take notes for personal use, but passed on their knowledge only verbally. 17 Preferring to transmit their specialised knowledge through audi

tion, few reciters wrote treatises. To facilitate memorisation, the Qur'an is

normally chanted or recited using a technique between stylised speech and

song. The technique has always been transmitted orally from master to pupil,

leading to the evolution of innumerable personal and regional variants. Even

12 Schoeler, Ecrire et transmettre, pp. 31 4.

13 Christel Kessler, ''Abd al Malik's inscription in the Dome of the Rock: A reconsidera

tion', JRAS, 3 (1970). Diacritical marks had already been used on the earliest complete

Arabic papyrus to survive from Egypt, a bilingual requisition of sheep written on 29

Jumada I 22/25 April 643, to distinguish important or potentially unfamiliar words, such

as names. See Beatrice Gruendler, Tfie development of the Arable scripts: From the Nabatean

era to the first Islamic century according to dated texts, Harvard Semitic Series (Atlanta,

1993), P- 157; Alan Jones, 'The dotting of a script and the dating of an era: The strange

neglect of PERF 558', Islamic Culture, 72, 4 (October 1998).

14 A. T. Welch, 'al Kur'an', Eh, vol. V, p. 408.

15 A. Jones, 'The Qur'an II', in A. F. L. Beeston et al. (eds.), The Cambridge history of Arabic

literature, vol. I: Arabic literature to the end of the Umayyad period (Cambridge, 1984), p. 242.

16 Schoeler, Ecrire et transmettre, p. 37.

17 Ibid., p. 38.

in the twentieth century the pre eminent theologians of al Azhar remained
opposed to notating it. 1

Revelation made scripture central in the new Islamic society, but Muslims
understood and diffused it in two very different ways. 19 They continued to
consider the text God's spoken word and transmitted it by audition. At the
same time, representatives of the state had established and 'published' a
written text by depositing reference copies throughout the realm. As the
people involved in the two modes of transmission differed both in motive
and practice, they eventually came into conflict. Audition won out: 'readers'
relying on what they had heard checked manuscripts for accuracy. 2,0 Even the
1343/ 1924 'official' Egyptian edition of the Qur'an was based not on a compar
ison of extant manuscripts but on information gleaned from audition as well as
the literature of 'readings'. 21

Early graffiti and documents confirm the essentially oral nature by which
the Qur'anic text was learned and transmitted. Although the majority of these
writings adhere to the canonical text, others sometimes introduce slight
variations either purposefully to personalise the quotation or inadvertently
because of imperfect recollection. 22 The continuity of this oral tradition to the
present day is a distinctive feature of Islamic societies, and the oral recitation of
the Qur'an remains an essential element of daily worship.

Oral and written literature

Soon after the Prophet's death in 10/632 his associates and contemporaries
began to collect reports (hadith) of what he had said and done during his
lifetime in order to better understand the Qur'anic revelation and lead the
correct Muslim life. The typical report consists of two parts: the chain of
transmission and the text itself. Being somewhat colloquial in tone, the
language often deviates from classical Arabic norms, but these stylistic

18 Eckard Neubauer, 'Islamic religious music', in Stanley Sadie (ed.), The new Grove
dictionary of music and musicians, 20 vols. (London, 1980).

19 For an eloquent discussion of orality and scripture in the Islamic world see Graham,
Beyond the written word.

20 Schoeler, Ecrire et transmettre, p. 41.

21 R. Paret, 'Kira'a', Eh, vol. V, pp. 127 9.

22 Thus, not only the inscription on the Dome of the Rock but also a graffito from the
environs of Mecca slightly adjusts the wording of Qur'anic verses; an Egyptian marriage
contract of the Fatimid period strings together snippets from several different but
similar verses. See Yusuf Ragib, 'Un contrat de mariage sur Soie d'Egypt Fatimide',
AI, 16 (1980); Robert Hoyland and Venetia Porter, 'Epigraphy', in McAuliffe (ed.),
Encyclopaedia of the Qur'an, vol. II, pp. 25 43.

Literary and oral cultures

peculiarities may either represent contemporary speech or artifices introduced
subsequently to give 'atmosphere'. 23

For some centuries Muslims had remained a minority and indigenous
populations continued to speak other languages, whether Berber dialects
in
North Africa or Persian in Iran, albeit with an increasing admixture of
Arabic
vocabulary. Many regions developed their own distinctive colloquial Ian
guages. These dialects incorporated local vocabulary, simplified
pronuncia
tion, abandoned inflection, and increased the importance of word order
and
other features of analytical languages. Known collectively as Middle
Arabic,
these colloquials were widely spoken but rarely written. As writers who
were always educated never wrote the spoken language, colloquials are
known from either literary quotations that represent contemporary
speech or
informal documents, such as lists, contracts and letters. 24

At first hadiths were transmitted orally. 25 Students memorised them
(and the
accompanying chains of transmission) by repetition, regularly repeating
texts
fifty, seventy or even one hundred times. The famous preacher and
encyclo
paedist al Khaob al Baghdad! (392 463/1002 71) advised students to
repeat to
each other what they had learned and quiz each other on it. Once
learned, the
lesson should be written down from memory; the written record should
serve
only as a reference when the student's memory failed. 2 Individuals with
prodigious memories were often the subjects of popular anecdotes. The
philol
ogist and lexicographer Ibn Durayd (223 321/837 933) would himself
transcribe
hadiths from memory before giving his notes to his students to copy.
Afterwards, he would tear up his notes. The young poet al Mutanabbi
(303
54/915 65) won a thirty folio book written by al Asma'i (d. 213/828) by
memo
rising its contents after a single reading. When al Ghazali (d. 505/1111)
was
robbed, he told the robber to take everything but his books, to which the
robber retorted, 'How can you claim to know these books when by taking
them,
I deprive you of their contents?' The theologian took the theft as a
warning from
God, and spent the next three years memorising his notes. Such great
masters of

23 Rabin et al., 'Arabiyya'.

24 Perhaps the largest such collection is the Geniza Documents, a trove of some 300,000
writings in Judaeo Arabic (Middle Arabic written in Hebrew characters), which were
discovered in a Cairo synagogue in the nineteenth century. See S. D. Goitein, A
Mediterranean society: The Jewish communities of the Arab world as portrayed in the docu
ments of the Cairo Geniza, 6 vols. (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1967 93).

25 Michael Cook, 'The opponents of the writing of tradition in early Islam', Arabica,

44 (1997).

26 For hadxth see Beeston et al. (eds.), Arabic literature to the end of the Umayyad period, chap.
10; George Makdisi, The rise of colleges: Institutions of learning in Islam and the West
(Edinburgh, 1981), pp. 99 105.

hadith as Ahmad ibn Hanbal (164 241/780 855), al Bukhari (194 256/810 70) and
Muslim (202 61/821 75) memorised hundreds of thousands of traditions along
with their chains of transmission. Abu Hanifa the Younger (d. 511/1118) quoted
hadiths without reference to any book, and jurisconsults based their opinions on
what he said. Reports of great trustworthiness were transmitted on his authority
alone. 27 Zayn al Din al 'Iraqi, a prominent member of the late eighth/

fourteenth century 'ulama\ memorised up to four hundred lines of text per
day while holding several jobs in Cairo's leading academic institutions. 2

The earliest transmitters may have taken notes, but they did not systemati
cally collect and arrange them in the first century of Islam. Writers were
probably hampered by the widespread belief that the Qur] an should be the
Muslims' only book, and that knowledge about the Qur'an, the traditions of the
Prophet, Arabic language, literature, law etc. should be transmitted from master
to pupil only by audition. Muhammad is reported to have said, 'Do not write
anything about me except the Qur] an, and if anybody has written anything, he is
to erase it.' 29 Nevertheless, scholars began to keep notes and even systematically
organised notebooks for their personal use; occasionally a caliph or other official
might also commission a collection of hadiths or other knowledge, but these
were intended for private libraries, not general circulation. 30

After some two centuries writing became increasingly important as a
means of transmitting religious and secular knowledge, although audition
retained its great prestige as the most reliable means of transmitting Prophetic
traditions, Qur'anic exegesis, history, grammar, literature and even medicine.
Scholars travelled to hear others recite their works and receive permission to
transmit them. Audition became closely tied to manuscript culture: since
copying a book was always considered the weakest form of transmission, to
be avoided whenever possible, permission to transmit knowledge was granted
on the basis not of actually owning a particular manuscript but of having heard
it read aloud. 31 Indeed, some objected to popular teachers and storytellers
transmitting knowledge because they had not learned through personal con
tact with a licensed authority. 32 Although some of this criticism conceals an

27 Makdisi, The rise of colleges, pp. 99 105, 'Memory and its aids'.

28 Jonathan P. Berkey, Popular preaching and religious authority in tfte medieval Islamic Near
East (Seattle and London, 2001), p. 33.

29 See Ignaz Goldziher, 'The writing down of the hadith', in Muslim studies
(Muhammedanische Studien), ed. S. M. Stern, trans. C. R. Barber and S. M. Stern, 2 vols.
(Chicago, 1971), vol. II, pp. 181 8.

30 Schoeler, Ecrire et transmettre, pp. 54 5.

31 Ibid., p. 130.

32 Berkey, Popular preaching, p. 75.

676

Literary and oral cultures

establishment disdain for non traditional modes of transmission, even some
noted scholars believed that truth was not the exclusive privilege of the elite:
the prolific scholar Abd al Wahhab al Sha'rani (d. 973/1565) sold all his books
to take up study with an illiterate shaykh. 33

Although audition always retained its pre eminence, three independent
developments coalesced by the late second/ eighth century to encourage
writing. First, scribes (kuttab; sing, katib) began to play increased roles in the
administrative bureaux as the Islamic empire expanded. This trend burgeoned
as many Persians came to be employed in state offices, slowly transforming
political and social values with their deep knowledge of Sasanian institutions
and practice. 34

Second, patrons such as al Ma'mun commissioned books for the royal
library, including translations of Greek and Persian literature and
systematic
compilations of law, exegesis, tradition, history, philology and administra
tion. 35 Although authors composed only single copies, the climate of
author
ship slowly but eventually spread to other fields, particularly the
religious
sciences.

Finally, the Arab conquest of Central Asia in the late first/seventh and
early
second/ eighth centuries brought knowledge of paper and papermaking
to the
Islamic lands. Paper afforded a cheaper, durable and widely available
alter
native to papyrus rolls or codices made from parchment sheets. Invented
in
China in the centuries before Christ, paper was carried by Muslims from
Central Asia throughout the Islamic lands. Paper mills were established
at
Baghdad in the late second/ eighth century, Syria and Egypt in the third/
ninth, and reached North Africa, Sicily and Spain in the fourth/tenth.
Simultaneously in Iran, the Qur'an, which had been copied exclusively on
parchment sheets, began to be transcribed on paper using new, more
legible
and more fully vocalised scripts derived from the 'cursive' scripts
formerly
used by scribes for ordinary writing. 36

The explosion of book learning in the medieval Islamic world is truly
astonishing. The ready availability of paper made it possible not only to
write books, but also to write on virtually any subject. 37 Few other
cultures

33 Ibid., p. 92.

34 Schoeler, Ecrire et transmettre, p. 60.

35 Ibid., pp. 64 6.

36 Jonathan M. Bloom, Paper before print: The history and impact of
paper in tfte Islamic world
(New Haven, 2001).

37 For a tenth century list of books and authors see al NadTm, Tfie Fihrist of al Nadim: A
tenth century survey of Muslim culture, ed. and trans. Bayard Dodge (New York and
London, 1970).

677

possessed as vast a literature, although it remains impossible to catalogue it
with any degree of accuracy. Some individuals were able to amass enormous
libraries: the neo Umayyad caliphs of Cordoba are said to have had 400,000
books, and comparable numbers are given for the libraries of Fatimid Egypt,
'Abbasid Baghdad and Buyid Shiraz. 3 In 383/99^. the Fatimid library con
tained thirty copies of al KhalU ibn Ahmad's lexicographical masterpiece Kitab
al 'ayn, twenty copies of al Tabarf s multi volume Ta'rikh (History) and one
hundred copies of Ibn Durayd's dictionary, the Jamhara. 39 These numbers,
even if exaggerated, testify to the effectiveness of publication by audition
before the era of printing.

Written and oral culture

The prevalence of writing is yet another remarkable feature of medieval
Islamic culture, for words were routinely inscribed on buildings, textiles and
objects of daily use. 40 This presupposes either an elevated level of literacy or
widespread familiarity with writing. From the late first/ seventh century
virtually all coins issued by Muslim rulers were exclusively decorated in

Arabic with religious sayings and the name of the ruler issuing the coin, the
place and the date. One had to be literate to visually distinguish a coin issued
by one ruler from another. From an almost equally early date ceramics were
decorated with signatures and expressions of good wishes. By the fourth/
tenth century potters in Nishapur and Samarqand inscribed wares with Arabic
aphorisms in decorative scripts that indicate the high level of competence in
Arabic in this Persian speaking region. Public buildings were routinely
inscribed with historical and Qur'anic texts. 41

The extraordinary pervasiveness of writing in medieval Islamic visual
culture does not mean that Islamic culture became exclusively a culture of
writing. For modern literates reading is a silent, wholly mental process, but
until recently reading was always a distinctly vocal and physical activity.

38 Youssef Eche, Les bibliotheques arabes publiques et semi publiques en Mesopotamie, en Syrie et
en Egypte au moyen age (Damascus, 1967).

39 Paul E. Walker, 'Fatimid institutions of learning', Journal of the American Research Center
in Egypt, 34 (1997), p. 195-

40 Sheila S. Blair, Islamic inscriptions (Edinburgh, 1998).

41 Ibid. The high degree of literacy in fifth /eleventh century Cairo is attested by plaques
(alwah) and graffiti cursing the Companions of the Prophet that were briefly placed
around the city. See Devin J. Stewart, 'Popular Shiism in medieval Egypt: Vestiges of
Islamic sectarian polemics in Egyptian Arabic', SI, 84, 2 (November 1996), p. 55.

678

Literary and oral cultures

Reading aloud also gave non literates access to writing, and most literates
preferred listening to something rather than scrutinising it written. Islamic law
developed an ambivalent attitude towards written documents. Legal theorists
considered written documents merely aids to memory and evidence only in so
far as the verbal testimony of witnesses confirmed them. Jurists tended to view
them with suspicion, primarily because they could be manipulated in a
manner impossible with the oral testimony of trustworthy persons. 42 The
effective legal instrument remained the verbal agreement made in the pres
ence of witnesses. Nevertheless judges kept records, and commercial law
relied on documents. Despite their theoretical neglect, they proved indispen
sable in practice and were constantly used, becoming a normal accompani
ment of every important transaction and engendering a highly developed
branch of practical law. 43

Some medieval Arabic documents even confirm the persistence of orality.
For example, four fourth /tenth century Egyptian contracts state that they had
been 'read to the seller in Arabic and explained to him' in Coptic, the language
of the Egyptian peasantry. 44 The contract may have been written, but its power
was activated only by reading aloud. In late medieval Cairo popular literature
was recited publicly. 45 The English traveller Edward Brown wrote in 1673 4 that
reading aloud was commonplace, with people listening in their leisure. 46 Even
in the mid twentieth century the few literates in an Egyptian village were
responsible for communicating cultural and religious information requiring
literacy; they served as mediators between the written and the oral. 47

42 See David S. Powers, 'The Maliki family endowment: Legal norms and social practices',
IJMES, 25, 3 (1993), p. 390. On written documents in Islamic law see Emile Tyan, Le
notariat et le regime de la preuve par ecrit dans la pratique du droit musulman (Beirut, 1959);
Jeanette A. Wakin, The function of documents in Islamic law (Albany, 1972); and Cook,
'Opponents of the writing'.

43 Joseph Schacht, An introduction to Islamic law (Oxford, 1966 [1964]), pp. 82, 193.

44 The fact that even oral Arabic had to be 'explained' to the parties to these contracts
indicates a lack of Arabisation after more than three hundred years of Arabic linguistic
dominance. It also confirms the lack of Arabisation and conversion in Egypt suggested
by both contemporaries and modern researchers. See, for example, Abu '1 Qasim Ibn
Hawqal, Kitab siirat al ard, ed. J. H. Kramers, Bibliotheca Geographorum Arabicorum
(Leiden, 1967 [1938]), p. 161; and Gladys Frantz Murphy, 'Arabic papyrology and Middle
Eastern studies', Middle East Studies Association Bulletin, 19, 1 (July 1985), p. 37.

45 Boaz Shoshan, 'On popular literature in medieval Cairo', Poetics Today, 14, 2 (Summer
1993), p- 350.

46 Nelly Hanna, In praise of books: A cultural history of Cairo's middle class, sixteenth to the
eighteenth century, Middle East Studies Beyond Dominant Paradigms (Syracuse, 2003),
p. 96-

47 Shoshan, 'Popular literature', p. 351.

679

Preachers and storytellers would sit or stand in the streets, reciting from memory passages from the Qur] an, traditions of the Prophet and stories of the
heroic exploits of early Muslims and others. 48 Some traditionists and jurists
worried that the stories were misleading or false, and that the common people
would transmit these 'unsound' or 'weak' sayings and stories. 49 Nevertheless
preachers attracted huge crowds: Abu 'Abd Allah al ShTrazi al Wa'iz ('the preacher'; d. 439/1047^) had 30,000 people in one Baghdad audience alone. 50

Storytellers played an important social role. The main season for storytell ing was winter or evenings during Ramadan, after the fast is broken. In the
Maghrib long summer evenings are a time for storytelling, while in Iran festivals such as the New Year, weddings and birthdays provide the occasion.
Surviving texts are inadequate records of what exactly took place during an
actual reading or performance. 51 The oldest Arabic popular text known is a
damaged bifolio bearing the beginning of the text of the Thousand nights. The
sheet once formed the first pages of a manuscript, copied in early third/ninth
century Syria, before a certain Ahmad ibn Mahfuz used it as scratch paper in
Safar 266 /October 879. 52

Other popular tales concerned real and mythic heroes. The romance of Battal, who died in battle against the Byzantines in 122/740, seems to have
emerged by the fourth/tenth century, and a full length version probably existed by the sixth/twelfth century, although no copies are known to survive.
The written version of the Sirat 'Antar (Adventures of c Antar) is known as
early as the sixth/twelfth century, and it remained popular for centuries. In
mid ninth/fifteenth century Cairo a miller named KhaM owned copies of it
and the Sirat dhat al himma (Romance of [the woman of] noble purpose) which

he gave to a preacher to recite for paying audiences. Perhaps the most popular
romance in Egypt was Sirat Baybars, first attested by the Egyptian chronicler
Ibn Iyas (852 c. 930/1448 c. 1524). 53 The colloquial text is interrupted and
enlivened by sections of rhymed prose and poems in classical metres. It has
remained popular, with frequent public recitals in Cairo and Damascus.

48 Berkey, Popular preaching, p. 13.

49 Ibid., p. 28.

50 Ibid., p. 25.

51 Shoshan, 'Popular literature', p. 351.

52 Nabia Abbott, 'A ninth century fragment of the "Thousand Nights": New light on the
early history of the Arabian Nights', JNES, 8, 3 (1949); Gulnar Bosch, John Carswell and
Guy Petherbridge, Islamic bindings and bookmaking (Chicago, 1981) (exhibition cata
logue), no. 97.

53 Shoshan, 'Popular literature', pp. 350 4.

Literary and oral cultures

The relationship between literary and oral cultures is therefore long and
complex, and oral culture, whether storytelling or popular preaching, contin
ues to play an important role in modern life. Any attempt to reconstruct the
oral culture of the past necessarily relies on written evidence, most of which

was produced by and for an important but narrower segment of society than
that which participated in the oral culture. One should, therefore, remember
that the rich written record represents only one facet of a richer and even
more varied culture of words.

681

25

Islamic art and architecture

MARCUS MILWRIGHT

This chapter presents an introduction to the art and architecture of the Islamic
world from the first/ seventh century through to the end of the twelfth/
eighteenth. 1 This is an exceptionally rich visual culture that encompasses the
portable artefacts and buildings produced in a region comprising Spain, North
and sub Saharan Africa, Sicily, Eastern and Central Europe, the Middle East,
Central Asia, the Indian subcontinent and South East Asia. Islamic art is
renowned for its achievements in calligraphy and complex forms of geometric
and vegetal ornament, but it also boasts a vigorous and inventive tradition
of figurative painting. It is important to recognise from the outset that the
distinctions made in traditional scholarship of Western European visual
culture between 'high art' (usually defined as architecture, painting and
sculpture) and 'craft' cannot be applied to an Islamic context. In order to
evaluate the main lines of development in Islamic art it is necessary to consider
media including pottery, metalwork, glass, textiles, mosaics, stucco, stone,

ivory and wood. Nor is it simply a matter of the sheer variety of media and
techniques; frequently the craftsmen involved in the manufacture of seem
ingly humble media such as glazed ceramics, carved and moulded stucco or
base metal vessels worked at the forefront of significant phases of artistic
creativity. Islamic architecture is equally diverse in character; masons and
allied craftsmen adapted to local building traditions, and made innovative use
of brick, stone, wood, glazed tile, plaster and other materials in the construe
tion and decoration of both religious and secular structures.

Forming a concise definition of Islamic art is not a straightforward task. In
the context of this discussion, artefacts and buildings are considered 'Islamic' if
they were made in regions under the control of rulers who professed the faith

Islamic art and architecture

of Islam. Some scholars extend the definition to include art and architecture
produced within non Muslim polities that were strongly influenced by the
cultural practices of Muslim regions. While this secondary definition is not
employed in this chapter, a clear distinction should be made between the

adjectives 'Muslim' and 'Islamic' as they are applied to art and architecture.

The term 'Islamic' encompasses the art and architecture associated with Muslim religious practice (places of worship, manuscripts of the Holy Qur] an, liturgical furniture and so on), but includes artefacts designed to perform secular functions as well as those made for the ritual practices of other religious communities living under Muslim rule. Furthermore, it should not be assumed that the artisans responsible for the buildings and artefacts discussed in this chapter were, necessarily, Muslims.

This chapter does not attempt an arrangement of significant artefacts and monuments according to chronological or geographical criteria. This approach has been adopted in a number of survey books, and these works are the best place to start a deeper study of the art and architecture of the Umayyad, 'Abbasid, Fatimid, Saljuq, Ilkhanid, Ayyubid, Mamluk, Nasrid, Trmurid, Ottoman, Safavid, Mughal and other dynasties. 2 The principal aim of this chapter is to isolate consistent preoccupations found in the art and architecture produced in the Islamic regions of Europe, Africa and Asia. After considering the cultural background of the Hijaz (western Arabia) in the first/ seventh century and the formative phase of Islamic art, the main body of the chapter looks at the varied ways in which key issues sacred space, the role of writing, ornamental traditions, commemorative art and architecture, and modes of artistic interaction with other cultures are interpreted in different regions and cultural contexts. The remainder of the chapter is concerned with the creation of art and architecture in different types of human environment: urban life, palatial culture and rural areas.

Background to the genesis of Islamic art

Islam had its origins in the Hijaz, but this arid region on the western side of the Arabian Peninsula plays a less significant role in the history of Islamic art and architecture. In the absence of reliable data from archaeological research it is

difficult to assess the character of the arts in towns such as Mecca and
Yathrib

2 See the general works listed in the chapter bibliography. Many of the
buildings and
artefacts discussed in this chapter are illustrated in these survey texts.
The following
footnotes concentrate upon more recent publications in the study of
Islamic art and
architecture.

683

The New Cambridge History of Islam

(later renamed Medina) in the sixth and early first/ seventh centuries.
These
settlements contained active trading communities maintaining contacts
with
southern Arabia and Ethiopia in the south and Palestine, Syria and Iraq
in the
north. The economic links must have led to the importation of luxury
goods,
and perhaps craftsmen from other regions. Some idea of the diversity of
the
material culture of the towns of pre Islamic Hijaz is provided by the
artefacts
excavated from an ancient mercantile settlement of Qaryat al Faw in the
south
of Saudi Arabia. Nevertheless, it is clear that the visual arts of the Hijaz
were
far less developed than those of the south of Arabia or of other regions of
the
Middle East and eastern Mediterranean. 3 This is best demonstrated by
con
sidering the chief ritual sanctuary of the pre Islamic Hijaz, the Ka'ba in
Mecca.

The Quraysh, the chief tribe of Mecca, ordered the reconstruction of the

Ka'ba in around 608. This structure comprised walls of alternating courses of
stone and wood (a style of building probably deriving from Ethiopian archi
tecture) with a flat roof supported by six wooden columns. 4 The Ka'ba, and
the area around it, have undergone numerous phases of reconstruction over
the intervening centuries, but the essential elements a small cuboid building
surrounded by an open space for the circumambulation of pilgrims remain
from this early period. The visual impact of the pre Islamic Ka'ba would,
however, have differed considerably from its appearance today. According to
the descriptions provided by early Muslim historians, the structure was
draped in brightly coloured, striped silks (sing, 'asb) from Yemen, while the
plastered walls of the interior were decorated with pictures (sing, sura) of
prophets, trees and angels. These painted motifs, and the 'idols' (sing, nusb
or sanam; probably referring to both figural sculptures and uncarved blocks of
stone) stored within the Ka c ba, were destroyed following Muhammad's
conquest of Mecca in 7/629.

We have no evidence concerning the precise appearance of paintings or
sculptures in the Ka'ba, but it is unlikely that they exhibited any great artistic
pretensions. Yemen was the only region of the Arabian Peninsula to possess a
major tradition of monumental art and architecture in the centuries before
Islam. The magnificent palaces, such as the semi mythical Ghumdan, lived
long in the imagination of Arab Muslim poets, though it is more difficult to
establish the tangible ways in which these structures may have affected the
design or ornamentation of later palatial or religious architecture in the

3 D. T. Potts, 'Arabia: Pre Islamic', in The Grove dictionary of art, ed. Jane Turner, 34 vols.
(New York, 1996), vol. II; Robert Hoyland, Arabia and the Arabs from tfie Bronze Age to the
coming of Islam (London and New York, 2001), pp. 167 97.

4 K. Creswell, Early Muslim architecture, rev. edn, 2 vols. (Oxford, 1969), vol. I.i, pp. 1 4.

Islamic world. Likewise, the contributions made by other pre Islamic Arab
dynasties, such as the Lakhmids of south western Iraq and the Ghassanids of
northern and eastern Syria, to the early development of Islamic art and
architecture remain uncertain. Other influences came from the visual cultures
of the Christian communities of the region, most notably those in Egypt and
Syria.

While the nature and extent of the influences continue to be the subject of
debate, there can be no doubt as to the overwhelming impact of the two
dominant cultures of the Mediterranean in the sixth and early first/ seventh
centuries: the Byzantine empire and the Sasanian dynasty of Iran. The
Byzantine empire lost her eastern provinces including the great cities of
Alexandria, Damascus and Antioch to the Arab Muslim armies. This con
quest not only brought the areas strongly influenced by Graeco Roman
culture into the domain of the Islamic world, but also was to have far
reaching consequences both in the visual arts and in numerous fields of
Islamic scholarship. Though the capital, Constantinople, stayed beyond the
reach of the caliphs, Byzantine culture retained an elevated status in the
Islamic world. 5 The Sasanian empire was to have an equally enduring legacy
in the decades and centuries after the death of the last shah, Yazdegerd III, in
30/651. The ruins of the great palace of Ctesiphon and the rock reliefs of
Naqsh i Rustam and Taq i Bustan stand today as impressive monuments of
the Sasanian dynasty, but they exerted an even more powerful presence in the

decades following the Arab conquest. Sasanian culture bequeathed to the rulers of the early Islamic world an iconography of absolute kingship as well as
a cycle of images devoted to the theme of princely pleasure.

The formative period of Islamic art

This section explores the period from the migration (hijra) to Medina in 1/622
through to 84/703. These chronological boundaries are, of course, a matter of
convenience, but they are designed to illustrate the fundamental and enduring
importance of concepts developed during these decades. It is during this period that the words of the Holy Qur'an were committed to writing, most

5 Richard Ettinghausen, From Byzantium to Sasanian Iran and the Islamic world: Three modes
of artistic influence (Leiden, 1972); Nadia El Cheikh, Byzantium viewed by the Arabs
(Cambridge, MA, and London, 2004).

6 Guitty Azarpay, 'Sasanian art beyond the Persian world', in John Curtis (ed.),
Mesopotamia and Iran in tfte Parthian and Sasanian periods: Rejection and revival, c. 238
BC AD 642 (London, 2000).

685

The New Cambridge History of Islam

of the component parts of the mosque were codified and many of the significant attitudes towards the content and production of art were first expressed. The political elite also began to exploit art and architecture as a

means to communicate the ideology of the Islamic state.

The Qur'an is the only significant text of the first/ seventh century that
provides first hand evidence for the ways in which Muslims defined their
religious spaces and for the attitudes they expressed concerning the arts.
It
should be noted that manufactured goods appear only peripherally in the
Qur'an. For instance, discussions of paradise (janna) in Q 18:31, 22:23,
43:70 3,
76:15 22 and 88:10 16 promise that the faithful will be robed in garments
of
brocaded green silk and bracelets of gold and pearls, recline upon
cushions and
rich carpets and drink from goblets of gold, silver and rock crystal. It
may be
assumed that such luxuries were beyond the means of many Muslims in
early
first/ seventh century Mecca and Medina, but the choice of media and
particularly the silk textiles, carpets and cushions give some indications
about what was valued in the society of the time.

Surprisingly, the Qur] an does not contain the sorts of explicit
condemnation
of figural painting and sculpture found in the Old Testament (e.g. Exod.
20:4
and Lev. 19:4). Those references to figural art that do appear
(particularly Q 3:43
and 34:12 13) lack the coherence of meaning that would lead one to
assume
that the visual arts were the focus of extensive debate within the Muslim
community. The worship of idols whether representational or not is,
however, the subject of unambiguous condemnation in the Qur] an
because
those who venerate idols commit the sin of shirk (i.e. associating gods
with the
One God, Allah). While a much harder line on the representation of
humans
and animals can be detected in the hadith (the collections of sayings
attributed to
the Prophet Muhammad), scholars have demonstrated that few of the
relevant
texts can be traced earlier than the beginning of the second/ eighth
century. As a
result, many of the attitudes expressed in the hadith and particularly
those
bearing on the prohibition of figural representation reflect the
conservative
standpoints of jurists in the second/ eighth and third/ninth centuries
rather than

the concerns of the Muslim community during the lifetime of the Prophet.
7

One of the five 'pillars' (sing, rukri) of Islam is the obligation to join in
communal prayer (salat). In order to fulfil its primary functional
requirement
a mosque whether it is a congregational mosque (often known as a Great
Mosque, Friday mosque, and in Arabic as masjid aljami\ or in Persian as
masjid i

7 Oleg Grabar, The formation of Islamic art, rev. edn (New Haven and
London, 1987),
pp. 73 98; Dan Van Reenan, 'The Bilderverbot, a new survey', Der Islam,
67 (1990).

686

Islamic art and architecture

jam?) used for Friday prayer or a local mosque used at other times
(masjid)
needs only to comprise a flat area for the worshippers and a wall, or
other
barrier, oriented toward the qibla (i.e. the Black Stone set into the corner
of the
Ka'ba in Mecca). This remarkably simple stipulation allowed the mosque
to
develop into a wide range of formal categories (see pp. 693 710), but the
most
important point in the present context is that, within a few decades after
1/622,
the Muslim community managed to fix upon a distinct arrangement of
archi
tectural components that would remain fundamental through to the
present
day. The earliest mosque to survive in its original plan was found during
excavations in the Iraqi town of Wasit, and has been attributed to the
governor
al Hajjaj ibn Yusuf in the year 84/703. The mosque is square in plan and

enclosed by a wall pierced by gateways on all sides except the south (qibla)
wall. The interior space is dominated by an open courtyard (sahn) surrounded
by arcades (sing, riwaq) on three sides, while the area in front of the qibla wall is
made up of a roofed prayer hall (zulla) five bays deep.

Built of brick and carved sandstone, the hypostyle (i.e. with a roof sup
ported on columns) mosque at Wasit follows a basic design that, according to
the written descriptions provided by Arab historians, was already employed in
the more rudimentary mosque in the Iraqi town of Kufa in the 50s /670s.
Going back still further, there are descriptions of earlier Iraqi mosques in Basra
(14/635) and Kufa (17/638). The former consisted simply of an area of land
demarcated by a fence, and the latter a compound defined by an encircling
ditch with a colonnade in front of the qibla. Not all early mosques followed this
arrangement, but a general pattern can be discerned: structures commonly
contain a rectangular courtyard distinguished from the surrounding area by
some form of barrier punctuated by regular openings or gateways. The most
important feature of each mosque was the wall orienting the faithful to the
qibla, and, in most cases, this area was marked by a single storey covered area
supported by columns. The inclusion of arcades around the courtyard occurs
in the second mosque at Kufa. 9

Most modern scholars have identified the house of the Prophet in Medina as
the prototype of the courtyard mosque. In this interpretation, the component
parts of the mosque came about through the functional adaptation of the house
of the Prophet as it accommodated the needs of the growing Muslim population.
Recently, the historical veracity of this 'organic' model has been questioned.

8 Creswell, Early Muslim architecture, vol. I.I, pp. 132 8.

9 Ibid., pp. 6 64; Jeremy Johns, 'The "House of the Prophet" and the concept of the
mosque', in Jeremy Johns (ed.), Bayt al Maqdis: Jerusalem and early Islam, Oxford Studies
in Islamic Art 9.2 (Oxford, 1999), pp. 59 69.

Without entering into detail on this issue, it now seems unlikely that Muhammad and his family had their dwelling places (sing, bayt) in the com
pound where the Muslim community worshipped (i.e. the masjid of the Prophet)
around i 11/622 32. In the absence of reliable evidence concerning the evolution
of the Prophet's mosque in Medina during the first decade, it cannot be demonstrated with certainty that the specific combination of elements making
up the hypostyle mosque came into being prior to the late 10s / 630s or 20s / 640s. IO

Though the early mosques are unlikely to have been impressive examples of architectural design, they did provide a visible sign of the presence of the
Muslim community. Another important area in which a Muslim identity (and
political authority) was given a public form from an early date was in the minting of coinage. The first phase of Islamic coin production starts in around
30/651 and consists primarily of undistinguished imitations of silver Sasanian
coins (drachm, Ar. dirham) and Byzantine copper coins (foRes, Ar. fab). The
most significant change is the addition of Arabic phrases such as bism oXlah
('in the name of God') and lillah al hamd ('praise to God'). The imitation of gold coins (solidus, Ar. dinar) of the rule of Byzantine emperor Heraclius (r. 610 41), took this process further in around 74/694 with the removal of the

crossbars from all the crosses and the addition of the Muslim profession of
faith (shahada) around the reverse.

In the 60s /680s and 70s /690s there was an increasing awareness of the
potential role of coinage as a means to propagate the values of the new state.
Three coins from the crucial phase 72 9/692 9 are illustrated on plate 25.1.
The obverse of the first type (pi. 25.1 (a)), dating 73 5/692 5, has the profile
bust of the Sasanian shah Khusrau II (r. 590 628) on the obverse, but the
reverse abandons the traditional fire altar in favour of a central praying figure
flanked by attendants. Most striking is that this represents a very public
commemoration of a caliph or governor engaged in Muslim ritual practice
(either the act of prayer or the giving of the Friday sermon (khutba)). This
desire to find visual means to express central aspects of the Islamic state is also
exhibited in the second example (pi. 25.1 (b)), dated 77/696?., and often known
as the 'standing caliph' dinar. The caliph's Arab cultural identity is signalled by
his long robe and head covering while his authority is indicated by the sword
he holds. 11 It is not certain why these, and other, experimental motifs were
abandoned, but final resolution of the question of coin design is more radical

10 Johns, '"House of the Prophet'", pp. 109 12.

11 Steve Album and Tony Goodwin, The pre reform coinage of the early Islamic -period, Sylloge
of Islamic Coins in the Ashmolean 1 (London, 2002), pp. 28, 91 3, cat.
nos. 5, 705.

Islamic art and architecture

25.1 (a) 'Orans' type dirham (73 5/692 5), SIC no. 107; (b) 'Standing caliph' dinar (77/696 7),
SIC no. 705; (c) epigraphic dinar (j%l697 8), Shamma no. 11 (not to scale). By permission of
the Visitors of the Ashmolean Museum.

68q

The New Cambridge History of Islam

and confident in tone (pi. 25.1 (c)). In 77/696?. 'Abd al Malik (r. 65 86/685 705)
issued a dinar devoid of imagery, comprising instead Arabic inscriptions: the
shahada and Q 9:33 on the obverse and Q 112 on the reverse. Dirhams carrying
the same formulae appeared in 79/698f. and, with remarkably few exceptions,
coins minted in the Islamic world remained restricted to epigraphy through to
the modern period. 12.

The confidence exhibited in the choice of Qur'anic verses and the bold
visual quality of the script on the epigraphic dinar of '77/696?. was the result of
considerable activity in two areas: first, the writing and dispersal of a canonical
recension of the Qur'an during the caliphate of 'Uthman (r. 23 35/644 55); and
second, the development of scripts suitable for the writing of Arabic. Though
the first issue is beyond the scope of the present chapter, the second is of
considerable importance to the subsequent development of Islamic art.

The words of the Qur'an occupy a pre eminent position in Islamic culture, and calligraphy remained the most respected of all the artistic disciplines.
Furthermore, the decision to emphasise the role of text as the primary bearer
of meaning in the ornamentation of religious architecture and artefacts associated with the practice of Islam inevitably focused attention on the aesthetic qualities of the scripts themselves.

The lack of uniformity in cursive scripts used in everyday transactions and
much official documentation is illustrated by the first/seventh and second/
eighth century papyri excavated in the Middle East. This may be contrasted
with the more formal scripts that appear on the earliest surviving pages from
manuscripts of the Qur'an, the monumental inscriptions from the Dome of
the Rock, the milestones erected along the major roads by caliph 'Abd al Malik
and the coins issued in the 70s /690s. The earliest Qur'an fragments are written
in an angular, slightly right sloping script known as Hijazi. In the coins and
monumental inscriptions commissioned by 'Abd al Malik the proportions of
the individual letters were regularised and the vertical components of the script straightened.

The greatest artistic achievement of the first/ seventh century is the Dome of
the Rock in Jerusalem (pi. 25.2). Dated by an inscription to 72/69if, and constructed during the rule of 'Abd al Malik, the Dome of the Rock forms part of a complex of structures on the Temple Mount (Ar. Haram al Sharif) that
includes the Aqsa mosque, completed by his son, caliph al Walid I (r. 86 96/

12 Sheila Blair, 'What is the date of the Dome of the Rock', in Julian Raby and Jeremy Johns
(eds.), Bayt al Maqdis: 'Abd al Malik's Jerusalem, Oxford Studies in Islamic Art 9.1 (Oxford
and New York, 1992), pp. 63 7.

Islamic art and architecture

25.2 Dome of the Rock, Jerusalem (72/691 2). Creswell archive no. 180, Ashmolean Museum.

705 15). The Dome of the Rock (Qubbat al Sakhra) has an octagonal plan with
two ambulatories running around the area containing the Rock, the summit
of Mount Moriah. The building has a wooden dome supported on a circular
drum and a combination of piers and columns. Centrally planned domed

The New Cambridge History of Islam

structures had long been employed as martyria in the Middle East and
Mediterranean regions, and the influence of Byzantine architecture can be
seen in the plan and the proportional systems of the Dome of the Rock. The
surviving internal decoration makes use of both Byzantine and Sasanian themes.
This list of influences fails to account either for the innovative nature of the
Dome of the Rock or for the visual impact the lavish decoration has on the
viewer. Abd al Malik's building was conceived on an imperial scale and
ornamented in the finest materials gold leaf mosaic, quarter sawn marble

and gilded bronze available in the first/seventh century.

The tiles that now adorn the exterior were added to the building by the Ottoman sultan Siileyman I in 951 8/1545 51, but much of the interior mosaic
decoration survives intact. The mosaics are taken up with a wide variety of
abstract motifs and stylised vegetal designs including vinescrolls, acanthus
leaves, palm trees and fruit. There are also representations of cornucopiae and
jewelled vases, as well as Sasanian winged crowns and Byzantine imperial
regalia. In addition, the mosaics contain bands of Arabic inscriptions written in
a bold Kufic script. Measuring some 240 metres, the longest inscription runs
around the internal and external faces of the inner octagonal arcade. The
precise selection of Qur'anic suras (chapters) reveals a proselytising message;
passages take issue with the Christian interpretation of Christ and of the
Trinity, and exhort other 'Peoples of the Book' (i.e. Christians and Jews) to
submit to the new faith of Islam. Despite the presence of so many inscriptions,
the precise function and meaning of the Dome of the Rock remain obscure.
Associations between the Dome of the Rock and the miraculous Night
Journey (isra] ; see Q 17:1) and Ascension (mi'raj) of the Prophet cannot be
traced back to the time of the construction of the building, though the
centralised plan might lend credence to the idea that it was designed as a
focus for pilgrimage. It is possible that the structure was intended to be a
monument to the victory of Islam. Many of the vegetal themes in the mosaics
also bring to mind visions of paradise, and perhaps the role of Jerusalem
during the judgement of souls at the end of time. 13

A number of important points can be drawn from the buildings and
artefacts of this formative period. Within two decades of the death of
Muhammad in 10/632 the Qur'an had been recorded in codex form. The
writing and decorating of the Qur'an would become one of the most

13 For different interpretations see Grabar, Formation, pp. 46 71; Miriam Rosen Ayalon, The

early Islamic monuments of the Haram al Sharif: An iconographic study, Qedem 28
(Jerusalem, 1989).

Islamic art and architecture

important artistic achievements of Islamic culture. By the end of the first/
seventh century inscriptions both religious and secular became a key mode
of artistic creativity in architecture and the portable arts. The first/seventh
century also witnessed the evolution of the mosque as a distinctive architec
tural form. The Ka'ba and the Dome of the Rock point to another important
direction in Islamic architecture: the commemorative monument. In later
centuries this area of artistic activity was dominated by funerary structures
built over the burial places of holy men and women, Muslim martyrs, or
members of political elites.

The Dome of the Rock and the experimental designs on early Islamic
coinage both illustrate the willingness of Muslim patrons to adapt motifs and
conventions appropriated from other artistic traditions. In the first century
after 1/622 there was an urgent need to construct a visual vocabulary that
would express the religious and political values of the state. Historical
circumstances changed in later periods, but it is striking how craftsmen
and patrons in the Islamic world remained open to cultural influences from
beyond the borders of the Islamic world. While the prohibition on human
and animal representations in religious art and architecture was firmly
established by the end of the first/seventh century, figural painting and
sculpture continued to thrive in secular contexts. Phases of state sponsored
iconoclasm are notable in Islamic history precisely because they are so rare.
Likewise, disapproval expressed in hadlth and the writings of later Muslim
jurists for such issues as consuming food and drink from precious metal
vessels or the wearing of silk by men did not seem to affect the demand

for such luxury commodities by those wealthy enough to afford them.
High quality silks, and other types of dyed and patterned textiles, enjoy an
important place in Islamic culture. It has been suggested that the aesthetic
values associated with richly patterned cloth permeated other aspects of the
decorative arts such as the cladding of architecture with mosaics, glazed
tiles, painted stucco and opus sectile. 14

Sacred spaces

Though the mosque in Wasit (84/703) has a relatively simple plan, it exhibits
a degree of elaboration not found in the earliest mosques in Iraq. The
mosque has arcades around three sides of the courtyard and, possibly, a

14 Lisa Golombek, 'The draped universe of Islam', in Priscilla Soucek (ed.), Content and
context of the visual arts in the Islamic world (University Park, PA, and London, 1988).

693

royal enclosure (maqsura) in front of the central zone of the qibla wall. The
excavations did not reveal a minbar (a pulpit that, according to Muslim
tradition, had its origins in the throne chair used by the Prophet), but this
may have been a portable feature in the mosque. That said, the structure at
Wasit lacks two features that were to become characteristic in later mosque
design: a concave niche (mihrab) located near the centre of the qibla wall and
a minaret (a tower from which the call to prayer is made). Other important,
though not universally encountered, features include monumental domes

and the introduction of axiality into the planning of the mosque. This section traces how Muslim sacred spaces came to be denned in architectural
terms, and considers the variant interpretations of two key features associ
ated with the mosque the minaret and the mihrab in different regions of the Islamic world.

During the reign of the Umayyad caliph al Walid I monumental mosques were constructed in Medina (on the site of the Prophet's mosque), Jerusalem
(the Aqsa mosque), San'a 3 in Yemen and Damascus in Syria. The ambitious
and innovative character of this phase is most easily appreciated in the best
preserved example, the Great Mosque of Damascus (constructed 87 97/ 706 16). The mosque occupies the site of the ancient pagan temenos in the
centre of the old city, and the exterior walls and corner towers retain elements
of the original Hellenistic and Roman masonry. Like the mosque of Wasit, the
Damascus mosque comprises a central courtyard with arcades on three sides
and a prayer hall in front of the qibla wall (pi. 25.3), but there are also very
significant differences. The Great Mosque of Damascus is much larger, with
the ground plan measuring 157 by 100 metres. The mosque was constructed of
limestone and faced with the finest materials: marble for the floors, revet ments and grille windows and, in the upper parts of the walls in the arcades
and the prayer hall, gold leaf mosaics. These mosaics comprised stylised landscapes and, on the qibla wall, a long panel of Qur'anic inscriptions. Only
a few sections of the original mosaic decoration survive around the courtyard. 15

The prayer hall of the mosque is composed of three aisles running parallel to the qibla. The aisles are bisected by a perpendicular nave, and the central crossing is marked by a monumental dome. The Great Mosque

15 For aspects of the structure and decoration of the building see Klaus Brisch,

'Observations on the iconography of the mosaics in the Great Mosque of Damascus',
in Soucek (ed.), Content and context; Finbarr B. Flood, The Great Mosque of Damascus: On
the makings of an Umayyad visual culture (Leiden, 2001).

694

Islamic art and architecture

25.3 Great Mosque of Damascus, Syria (87 97/706 16). Facade of the prayer hall. Photo:
Marcus Milwright.

of Damascus contains the first surviving mihrab (an earlier mihrab placed in
the Mosque of the Prophet between 88/707 and 90/709 no longer exists)
located on the same axis as the perpendicular nave and the northern
entrance to the courtyard. The mihrab an architectural feature that admits
no obvious teleological interpretation has been interpreted as a symbolic
commemoration of the place on the qibla wall in the mosque in Medina

695

occupied by the Prophet during prayers. 1 The Umayyad caliphs perhaps

employed the mihrab and the monumental minbar in their mosques as symbols of their authority.

Though the Great Mosque of Damascus has undergone many changes through its history, the plan of the building has remained largely unchanged.
One of the remarkable features of the courtyard plan, however, is its capacity
to expand through the repetition of specific building units. Often, phases of
expansion were necessitated by the growth in the Muslim community in a given locality, though rebuilding also provided an opportunity for Muslim rulers to make conspicuous displays of piety through the elaboration of specific components of the mosque or the use of expensive decorative materi
als. Different aspects of this process can be seen in three major mosques of the
early Islamic period: Qayrawan in Tunisia, Cordoba in Spain and Isfahan in
Iran. It would be possible to isolate many issues from these examples, but I
will concentrate upon the treatment of three crucial architectural features
the minaret, the dome and the mihrab.

The first mosque at Qayrawan was constructed in 50/670 by the general 'Uqba ibn Nafi 1 , but no trace of this structure survives. The present plan of
the mosque can be attributed to three phases of building ordered by the Aghlabid governors of the region in the third/ninth century (221/836, 248/
863 and 261/875). Another restoration was ordered by the Hafsid dynasty in
the seventh/thirteenth century. The mosque constructed by the Aghlabid governors is a hypostyle structure with a large courtyard surrounded by arcades on three sides and a prayer hall on the south east side. The adaptations of this basic courtyard mosque plan are significant, however. The prayer hall is elaborated through the widening of the central aisle and
the creation of a perpendicular aisle running parallel to the qibla wall. The
central aisle has domes at the point of convergence with the qibla aisle (i.e. in front of the mihrab) and where it meets the courtyard. This creates a
main axis through the building that is picked up by the monumental minaret
(pi. 25.4 (a)) located near the centre of the north western arcade. This axial arrangement of mihrab, widened central aisle and monumental minaret

was probably first formulated in the Abbasid imperial mosques of Iraq. The influence of the arts of the 'Abbasid heartland is also seen in the

16 George Miles, 'Mihrab and 'anazah: A study of early Islamic iconography', in G. Miles
(ed.), Archaeohgica orientalia in memoriam Ernst Herzfeld (Locust Valley, NY, 1952);
Estelle Whelan, 'On the origins of the mihrab mujawwaf. A reinterpretation', IJMES,
18 (1986).

696

Islamic art and architecture

25.4 (a) Minaret of the Great Mosque in Qayrawan. Creswell archive no. 6725, Ashmolean
Museum; (b) Qutb minar, Quwwat al Islam mosque, Delhi (592/1195). Photo: Hussein
Keshani.

lustre painted glazed ceramic tiles, imported from Iraq, that ornament the
mihrab. 17

While the Iraqi influences reflect the fact that the Aghlabid governors
continued to acknowledge the authority of the Abbasid caliphs, it would be
a mistake to underestimate the importance of local factors in the structure and
decoration of the Great Mosque of Qayrawan. For instance, the two ruined
third/ninth century mosques of the city of Samarra 3 (which functioned as the

Abbasid capital between 221/836 and 279/892) have giant helicoidal minarets
located just outside the main walled area of the mosque. It has been suggested

17 George Marcais, Les faiences a reflets metalliques de \a grande moschee de Kairouan
(Paris, 1928).

The New Cambridge History of Islam

25.4 (cont.)

that these dramatic features owe their origins to ancient Mesopotamian ziggurats. 1 By contrast, the square planned minaret at Qayrawan, with its
arrangement of three diminishing stages and a dome crowning the uppermost
section, can be traced back to the antique lighthouses and towers found in
North African sites such as Salakta and Leptis Magna. In other words, archi
tectural concepts might be transferred around the Islamic world, but the precise manner in which they were manifested was conditioned by factors
including local building traditions, the availability of building materials and
the political concerns of the ruling dynasty.

The Great Mosque of Cordoba provides another example of the adaptation
of the basic courtyard mosque design. The mosque underwent a series of

18 Jonathan Bloom, Minaret: Symbol of Islam, Oxford Studies in Islamic Art 7 (Oxford and
New York, 1989), p. 102.

Islamic art and architecture

major expansions and renovations from the time of its first construction in the
second/ eighth century, but the most magnificent phase is attributed to the
rule of the Umayyad caliph al Hakam II between 350/961 and 366/976. His
extension of the prayer hall to the south involved the creation of a royal
enclosure, or maqsura, composed of three domed bays in front of the mihrab.
The mihrab itself is not simply a concave niche, but an elaborate horseshoe
shaped arch leading into a small octagonal chamber surmounted by a shell
shaped dome. This maqsura was distinguished from the remainder of the
prayer hall by the use of polylobed and interlocking arches carrying delicately
carved bands of ornament (an elaboration of the bichromatic voussoirs
used for the arches in the remainder of the prayer hall). The grandeur of
this zone was further emphasised by the elaborate domes. Marble veneer,
carved marble panels and mosaic form the main components of the decoration
of the mihrab arch. The arch is framed by an impressive rectangular band
containing a Qur'anic inscription in golden Kufic on a dark blue mosaic
ground. 19

The Great Mosque of Isfahan points towards another variant on the court
yard mosque design. The structural history of this building is particularly
complex, but archaeological work has identified the important phases of
activity starting from the second/ eighth century. Most important in the
present context is the transformation of the conventional courtyard mosque
during the fifth/ eleventh and sixth/twelfth centuries. The first significant
change was the construction of a monumental domed chamber in front of

the mihrab in around 478/1086. Commissioned by Nizam al Mulk, the chief
minister (wazif) of the Saljuq sultan Malikshah (r. 465 85/1072 92), the domed
chamber radically altered the visual impact of the prayer hall. In 480/1088
Nizam al Mulk's rival Taj al Mulk ordered the building of another domed
chamber (Gunbad i Khaki) just outside the north eastern boundaries of the
mosque (as the mosque has expanded, this chamber has been incorporated
into the main structure). The last major change from this phase occurred over
the following decades and involved the insertion of four large vaulted cham
bers (iwans) into the facades of the courtyard. 20

While the iwan is a common feature of pre Islamic Persian architecture
employed, most famously, in the facade of the Sasanian palace at Ctesiphon
the reasons behind the adoption of the four iwan plan in Iranian mosques and

19 Jerrilyn Dodds, 'The Great Mosque of Cordoba', injerrilyn Dodds (ed.), al Andalus: Tfte
art of Islamic Spain (New York, 1992).

20 Oleg Grabar, The Great Mosque of Isfahan (New York, 1990), pp. 43 60.

The New Cambridge History of Islam

25.5 Zone of transition in the dome chamber, Great Mosque of Ardistan, Iran (early sixth/
twelfth century). Photo: Marcus Milwright.

madrasas (religious schools) remain obscure. 2,1 These imposing chambers
facing onto the courtyard have no liturgical function but, at Isfahan, they have the effect of creating a major axis from the dome in front of the mihrab
through to the north dome, and a secondary axis from the north west to the
south east. The domed chamber in front of the mihrab and the four twans around the courtyard were soon picked up in provincial mosques. The mosque at Ardistan was given the four iwan plan in the early sixth/twelfth
century. The most impressive section of the mosque is the domed chamber,
which contains a monumental carved stucco mihrab. The elaborate squinches
in the zone of transition (pi. 25.5) follow the design of those in the north dome
at Isfahan. The four iwan plan was to become standard for mosques, and other
types of religious structure, in Iran and the Islamic east for the following centuries. Outstanding later examples include the Bibi Khanum mosque in
Samarqand (801 8/1398 1405), the Ghiyathiyya madrasa in Khargird (846 9/
1442 5) and the Masjid i Shah in Isfahan (1021 40/1612 30).

21 Robert Hillenbrand, Islamic architecture: Form, function and meaning (Edinburgh and
New York, 1994), pp. 173 86.

Islamic art and architecture

25.6 Entrance portal of bimaristan of Nur al Din, Damascus, Syria (549/1154). Photo:

Marcus Milwright.

This architectural concept became popular in other regions, and numerous
examples of four iwan mosques, madrasas and bimaristans (hospitals) can be
identified from the sixth/ twelfth century onward. The bimaristan of the
Zangid ruler Nur al Din in the Syrian city of Damascus (549/1154) illustrates
the transposition of this eastern building plan, and other innovations such as
the muqarnas vault, into Syrian architecture (pi. 25.6). More monumental in

character is the complex constructed in the Egyptian capital, Cairo, by the
Mamluk sultan al Nasir al Hasan in 757 64/1356 63. Standing beneath the
citadel, and originally located next to a large parade ground, this vast complex
comprises a mosque, four madrasas (one for each orthodox school of Muslim
law), a mausoleum for the founder, an orphanage, a hospital and shops. 22 The
four vwans dominate the facades of the central courtyard and tower above the
viewer in a manner that contrasts markedly with the more spacious impres
sion found in the Great Mosque of Isfahan. While this imposing sense of
verticality is maintained throughout the interior and exterior of the Sultan
Hasan complex, the decoration finds a balance between monumentality and
fineness of detail. Striking features include the use of alternating bands of

white and coloured marble veneer (a style known as ablaq) and the wealth of
carved ornament.

Both the dome and the minaret were put to use with dramatic effect in the
mosques constructed during the Ottoman period (680 1342/ 1281 1924). One
of the most impressive in the Ottoman capital, Istanbul, is the Suleymaniye
mosque (958 64/1550 57), built for sultan Siileyman I (r. 926 74/1520 66) by
the famous architect Sinan (d. 996/1588). The precinct containing the mosque
and the founder's tomb is surrounded by a bathhouse (hammatn), five madra
sas and several other teaching institutions and ancillary structures. While the
mosque retains the courtyard as part of the plan, the emphasis of the design is
firmly located with the prayer hall. The dominant feature of the prayer hall is
the large central dome, though the architect employs two semi domes to
introduce a processional axis from the main entrance to the mihrab (and,
beyond that, to the tomb of Siileyman behind the qibla wall). The design of
the prayer hall alludes to the sixth century Hagia Sophia, though it is clear that
Sinan's structure was meant to be a reinterpretation of this theme and not
merely a pastiche. Where the ancient church was dark and sombre in charac
ter, the walls of the Suleymaniye mosque are punctured by numerous
windows flooding the interior with light. Another conspicuous feature of
this, and all other Ottoman mosques, is the use of the thin, pencil like
minarets. 23

The basic model established in the imperial mosques of Istanbul proved to
be highly influential upon the regions of the Ottoman empire. Architects and
engineers were sent from the Ottoman capital to undertake specific

22 Howyda al Harithy, 'The complex of Sultan Hasan in Cairo: Reading between the
lines', Muqarnas, 13 (1996).

23 Godfrey Goodwin, A history of Ottoman architecture (London, 1971), pp. 215 239.

25.7 Tzisdaraki mosque in Athens (c. 1170/ 1757). Photo: Marcus Milwright.

commissions in the provinces. State control over the central aspects of design
ensured a remarkable degree of continuity in the appearance of Ottoman religious architecture from regions as dispersed as Syria, Palestine, Egypt,
Cyprus and the Balkan countries. 24 An example of this type of provincial Ottoman structure is the Tzisdaraki mosque in Athens, dating from around
1170/1757 (pi. 25.7). The lower storey is given over to shops with the mosque
occupying the area above. Now missing its minaret, the mosque is composed
of a portico covered by three domes and a square planned prayer hall surmounted by an octagonal zone of transition and a dome.

Other solutions were found for the design of the mosque. Some, such as the
third/ninth century Masjid i Ta'rikh in Balkh in Afghanistan and the Bab Mardum in Toledo, Spain (390/1000) dispensed with the courtyard and arranged the square planned prayer hall into nine bays, each surmounted by
a vault. 2,5 This type of nine bay mosque is known in a few examples spread

24 For Greece and the Balkans see essays in Machiel Kiel, Studies on the Ottoman architecture

of the Balkans (Aldershot, 1990).

25 Geoffrey King, 'The mosque of Bab Mardum', Art and Archaeology Research Papers,
2 (1972).

across the Islamic world, but other developments were more localised in character and reflected the building traditions and cultural values of a specific
region. A few examples can be given to illustrate the considerable degree of
diversity. The Great Mosque of Xian in central China (founded in 176/792.^.,
and constructed in its present form in 794/ i392f.) adopts Chinese modes of
construction and arranges the structure along the east west axis into a series
of courtyards and pavilions. The minaret takes the form of an octagonal
pagoda three storeys high, decorated at each corner with sculptures of tradi
tional Chinese dragons. 2 Traditional mosques in Indonesia, such as the
Masjid Agung in Demak in Java (from c. 879/1474), are based around a
square planned prayer hall covered by a tall, three tiered hipped roof. 27 The
Sankore mosque in Mali (constructed between the eighth/fourteenth and the
thirteenth/ nineteenth centuries), and most other traditional mosques in west
ern sub Saharan Africa employ the conventional courtyard plan, though the
repeated buttresses on the exterior and the practice of inserting groups of logs
at regular intervals into the walls are unique in the religious architecture of the
Islamic world. 2

The minaret became a standard feature of mosque design in areas under the
control of Sunni rulers in the third /ninth century, and in later periods it was
also adopted by most other Muslim groups. One Muslim sect, the Ibadfs,
remains doctrinally opposed to the use of minarets, regarding them as an
innovation unknown during the life of the Prophet. 29 The association between
the minaret and the call to prayer (adhan) may seem so obvious as to need
little explanation, but it is worth pointing out that the adhan could just as easily
be made from the roof of the mosque (and, according to Muslim tradition, the
Prophet instructed Bilal to call the faithful to prayer in just such a manner).
Furthermore, many minarets are so tall as to obstruct what appears to be their
primary function. Indeed, it is only with the advent of modern sound ampli
fication that mu'adhdhins atop lofty minarets are able to make themselves
audible in the town below. The implication to be drawn from these observa
tions is that minarets might be designed with other purposes than simply the
call to prayer. 30

26 Luo Xiaowei, 'China', in Martin Frishman and Hasan uddin Khan (eds.), The mosque:
History, architectural development and regional diversity (London, 1994).

27 Hugh O'Neill, 'South east Asia', in Frishman and Khan (eds.), Mosque, pp. 225 40. See also
Zakaria AH, Islamic art in Southeast Asia, 830 AD i}jo AD (Kuala Lumpur, 1994), pp. 279 93.

28 Labelle Prussin, 'Sub Saharan West Africa', in Frishman and Khan (eds.), Mosque, pp. 181 93.

29 Paolo Costa, Historic mosques and shrines of Oman, BAR International Series 938
(Oxford, 2001), p. 35.

30 Bloom, Minaret; Hillenbrand, Islamic architecture, pp. 129 71.

Islamic art and architecture

The divergent characteristics of the minarets in the mosques of Samarra',
Qayrawan, Istanbul and Xian illustrate the ways in which local building
traditions may affect this most conspicuous feature of mosque
architecture.
For instance, the brick and stone minaret (dated 474/1081) attached to
the
mosque of the southern Egyptian town of Isna appears to owe little to the
contemporary architecture of the capital, Cairo. Rather, the influences
seem
to derive from the rural traditions of the area and the building styles of
the
Hijaz. 31 Iranian minarets are usually tall with a circular plan on a
square base,
and most have bands of decoration and inscriptions either within the
brick
work or picked out in glazed tile. The virtuosity displayed in the use of
brick
patterns (banna'i) can be seen in the minaret added to the Tan khana at
Damghan in 417 20/1026 29 (pi. 25.8 (a)) and continues into the Saljuq
period
(429 590/1038 1194). The Iranian mode of minaret building seems to
have
affected architectural styles to both the west and the east. Persianate
minarets
were constructed in sites in northern Syria during the sixth/twelfth and
early
seventh/ thirteenth centuries. Looking east, the brick minaret of the
Amin
mosque (1197/ 1778) in the western Chinese city of Turfan is ornamented
with
bands of repeated geometric designs that recall earlier Iranian
structures. The
unusual tapered profile seems, however, to owe more to local building
traditions (pi. 25.8 (b)). 3i

A further function for the minaret is suggested by the giant Qutb Minar
within the Quwwat al Islam mosque in Delhi in India (pi. 25.4 (b)).

Constructed in several phases from 592/1195, the 72 metre minaret originally
stood to the south east of the mosque (it is now incorporated into the larger
complex). This impressive construction, consisting of five tapering shafts with
balconies supported on muqarnas corbels, was commissioned by Qutb al Din
Aybak, the governor of Ghurid territories in India. The mosque stood upon
the site of a demolished temple and made extensive use of spolia from Hindu
and Jain religious sites. It is likely that the Qutb Minar was meant to be read as
a symbol of the victory of Islam over the existing faiths of the region. This
triumphal theme is also seen in the 62 metre tower of Jam in Afghanistan,
constructed by the Ghurid ruler Ghiyath al Din Abu al Fath Muhammad
(completed in 590/1194). Like the Qutb Minar, the notion of victory is
suggested through the use of scale and the choice of Qur'anic inscriptions
encircling the tower. These same architectural and epigraphic themes are

31 Bloom, Minaret, pp. 136 40.

32 Bernard O'Kane, 'Iran and Central Asia', in Frishman and Khan (eds.), Mosque, p. 136.

705

25.8 (a) Minaret attached to the Tan khana mosque in Damghan, Iran (c. 417 20/1026 29).
Photo: Barry Flood; (b) Minaret of the Amrn mosque, Turfan (1197/1778). Photo: Astri
Wright.

Islamic art and architecture

(b)

707

evident in towers erected by the earlier Ghaznavid rulers in Ghazna (Afghanistan) in the first half of the sixth/twelfth century. 33

The mihrab became an important feature in major mosques in locations such as Qayrawan and Cordoba, but it could also form the main focus of artistic activity in much smaller structures. In regions such as Iran and Oman it
is not uncommon to find elaborately carved stucco mihrabs up to five metres
tall within small mosques and mausolea. Stucco is a relatively cheap material,
and it has the advantage of being easy to mould and carve into complex designs. An early example of an elaborately carved stucco mihrab can be found
in the mosque of the Iranian town of Na'in, dating to the fourth /tenth century, although a much larger number of extant examples come from the
Saljuq and Ilkhanid (654 754/1256 1363) periods. The mihrabs in sixth/twelfth
century Iran may have been produced by teams of itinerant craftsmen, and it
seems likely that the proliferation of stucco prayer niches (it is not unusual for
an Iranian mosque to have several along the length of the qibla wall) can, in

part, be attributed to individual commissions by pious Muslims who wished
to beautify their local mosque or shrine. 34 Iranian mihrabs of the Saljuq and
Ilkhanid periods usually comprise a series of elaborate frames around a small
concave niche with a shallow arched recess above. Typically these features
combine bands of inscriptions with panels of stylised vegetation and geo
metric patterns carved in high relief.

A group of monumental mihrabs dating from the seventh/thirteenth to the
eleventh/seventeenth centuries survives in the Ibadi mosques of Oman. One
of the most impressive is to be found in the al Shawadhina mosque in al 'Aqr
(Nizwa) (pi. 25.9). The inscription above the central arched recess gives the
date of Ramadan 936/ April May 1530, and provides the names of those who
funded the work as well as the craftsman, 'Isa ibn Abdallah ibn Yusuf. The
imposing inscription at the top of the mihrab comprises the profession of faith
(shahada). The entire surface is made up of dense vegetal interlace patterns
and repeated abstract designs that appear to echo the motifs found on printed
and embroidered textiles. A further decorative aspect is provided by the
inclusion of Chinese blue and white porcelain bowls embedded into the
stucco surface. 35

Mihrabs could also be constructed using other media. The wooden mihrabs
made for the mosque of Sayyida Ruqayya in Cairo (533 40/1138 45) and the

33 Ralph Pinder Wilson, 'Ghaznavid and Ghurid minarets', Iran, 39 (2001).

34 Raya Shani, 'On the stylistic idiosyncracies of a Saljuq stucco workshop from the region
of Kashan', Iran, 27 (1989), pp. 73 4.

35 Costa, Mosques, pp. 53 7, 242.

Islamic art and architecture

25.9 Mihrab in al Shawadhina mosque, al 'Aqr, Oman (936/1530). Photo: Ruba Kana'an.

shrine (maqam) of Ibrahim in the Aleppo citadel, Syria (563/n68f.) are constructed of small interlocking sections that combine to form complex geometric interlace patterns (the same technique was commonly employed
in the construction of minbars at this time). 36 Glazed tile also became a popular

36 Anna Contadini, Fatimid art at the Victoria and Albert Museum (London, 1998), p. 112,
fig. 36; Yasser Tabbaa, The transformation of Islamic art during the Sunni revival (London,
2001), pp. 88 91, fig. 39.

The New Cambridge History of Islam

medium for mihrabs in the eastern Islamic world. This type of glazed ceramic
mihrab is exemplified by one made in the Iranian town of Kashan in 623/1226
by Hasan ibn c Arabshah Naqqash. 37 Like the stucco prayer niches of Iran, the

composition relies upon an upper and a lower arch (each supported by
attached columns) framed by rectangular bands containing script, but
the
ornamentation on the Kashan mihrab is provided by underglaze painting
in
cobalt blue and overglaze lustre decoration. Finally, the mihrab could be
translated into a two dimensional image on portable artefacts such as the
carpets used by Muslims during prayer.

The written word

Arabic written in Kufic script is encountered in the mosaic inscriptions of
the
Dome of the Rock and portable artefacts such as coins from the 70s
/690s.
From the second/eighth to the end of the fourth/tenth centuries there
exist
numerous examples of Qur'ans written in Kufic script on parchment.
Typically, the format of the page is horizontal with wide margins left
around
three sides. Some Kufic Qur'ans have as few as three lines on each page
with
the complete text contained within as many as thirty separately bound
parts
(sing. juz'). While each juz' would usually have decorated frontispieces
and
finis pieces, the main body of the text is striking for the absence of
ornament.
The script is usually laid out in thick strokes of black with the
vocalisation
sometimes marked with red dots. 38 One of the most dramatic of the
Kufic
Qur'ans has been attributed to North Africa (perhaps Qayrawan) in the
early
fourth/tenth century. Possibly produced for the Fatimid caliphs, the
parch
ment leaves are stained blue and the Kufic script is written in gold. 39
Variant
forms of Kufic script can be found in different regions of the Islamic
world.
Maghribi (i.e. western Islamic) styles often introduce an oblique
emphasis and
long, sloping tails into the letter forms as a means to create a rhythmic
quality
on the page. Complex forms of Kufic also appear in architecture. For
instance,

the Duvazda Imam in the Iranian town of Yazd (429/1037) contains a series of
Qur'anic and foundation inscriptions painted on the interior (pi. 25.10). The
plaiting of the vertical characters and the elaboration of the terminals are

37 Arthur Lane, Early Islamic pottery (London, 1947), pi. 66; Oliver Watson, Persian lustre
ware (London and Boston, 1985), pp. 130 1, 190.

38 Francois Deroche, The Abbasid tradition: Qur'ans of the 8th to the 10th centuries AD, Nasser
D. Khalili Collection of Islamic Art 1 (London, 1992).

39 Ibid., pp. 92 5, no. 42.

Islamic art and architecture

25.10 Inscription from the Duvazda Imam, Yazd (429/1037). Photo: Barry Flood.

features also encountered in carved stucco mihrabs and glazed ceramics in
eastern Iran during this period. 40

Many other types of script existed the Iraqi bookseller and scholar Ibn al Nadlm(d. 385/995 or 388/ 998) lists twenty six separate styles but, until the
end of the fourth/tenth century, they were employed for secular purposes.

The proportional systems governing these variant scripts had been regularised
by Ibn Muqla (d. 328/940), the wazir (chief minister) to the 'Abbasid caliph in
Baghdad, but the most significant change can be traced several decades later
with the production of a small, single volume Qur'an by the scribe 'Alt ibn
Hilal ibn al Bawwab (d. 413/1022). 4I Written on pale brown paper, Ibn
al Bawwab's Qur'an (dated 391/iooof) is the first to make use of two forms
of cursive script naskh for the main text and thuluih for the sura headings
and has all of the diacritical points and vowels marked into the main text. The
unpretentious quality of the manuscript disguises its significance to the history
of Islamic art. The change from the austere and monumental Kufic to the
more flowing naskh and thuluih scripts greatly enhanced the legibility of the
Qur'an and paved the way for the development of other scripts in later

40 Lisa Volov (Golombek), 'Plaited Kufic on Samanid epigraphic pottery', Ars Orientalis,
6 (1966).

41 Tabbaa, Transformation, pp. 25 52.

7ii

The New Cambridge History of Islam

centuries. Cursive scripts also became standard for monumental inscriptions
on architecture from the sixth/twelfth century. The domed chamber of the
Great Mosque of Ardistan contains an inscription in thuluth script carved in a
stucco band beneath the zone of transition (pi. 25.5).

Some of the finest Qur'ans of the later Islamic period were produced
in Egypt and Syria during the Mamluk sultanate (548 922/1250 1517).
Often the work of several skilled craftsmen, these multi volume works
were commissioned for religious institutions built by Mamluk sultans and
amirs. Qur'ans such as the seven volume version commissioned by Baybars
al Jashnikir (r. 704 5/1304 6) are notable both for the quality of the scripts and
the elaborately painted and gilded pages that form the frontispieces of each
volume (pi. 25.11). As with the Ibn al Bawwab Qur'an, the calligraphers of the
Mamluk period often employed different scripts for the main text and the sura
headings. 42 This combination of more than one script is also seen in inscrip
tions applied onto architecture. For instance, Iranian stucco mihrabs often
have naskh script for the Qur'anic verses in the framing band and Kufic for
secondary inscriptions around the inner arches.

Inscriptions are a common feature of the portable arts, though their content
is not exclusively religious in character. The glazed ceramics produced in
north eastern Iran and Transoxania in the Samanid period (204 395/819 1005)
sometimes carry elegant Kufic script painted in black pigment over a white
slip. These inscriptions may wish blessings to the owner of the vessel, but the
most elaborate contain improving aphorisms such as patience is the key to
felicity' and 'generosity is the quality of the people of paradise'. 43 The interior
and exterior decoration of the Egyptian inlaid brass basin made for the
Mamluk sultan al Nasir Muhammad ibn Qalawun (c. 730/1330) is dominated
by bands of Arabic inscriptions written in thuluth script similar to that
employed in Mamluk Qur'ans of the eighth/fourteenth century (pi. 25. 12). 44
The grandiose inscriptions have no religious content, but rather celebrate the
sultan for whom it was made. The smaller, secondary inscriptions in
the roundels magnify this message with the words 'Glory to our master, the
sultan'. Similar themes are picked up on textiles. For instance, in the early

centuries, robes bestowed upon an official by the caliph would be decorated
with embroidered inscriptions (tiraz) carrying the latter's regnal name and
titles. Embroidered tiraz bands are also often seen on the clothing of

42 David James, Qur'ans of the Mamluks (London, 1988).

43 Sheila Blair, Islamic inscriptions (New York, 1998), pp. 151 2.

44 Esin Atil, Renaissance of Islam: Art of the Mamluks (Washington, DC, 1981), pp. 50 116.

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25.12 Inlaid brass basin made for Sultan al Nasir Muhammad, Egypt (c. 730/1330), OA
1851.1 4.1. By permission of the British Museum.

characters in manuscript illustrations painted in Syria and Iraq during the
seventh/thirteenth century (pi. 25.18).

Ornamental traditions

Complex geometric interlace, repeated patterns and stylised vegetal themes
are often seen as defining characteristics of Islamic art and architectural
decoration and, indeed, there are countless examples of these phenomena
in the visual cultures of the Islamic world. That said, this is far from being the
only culture to exhibit such an interest in forms of non representational and
vegetal ornament. Furthermore, the ornamental designs we possess from the
first two centuries of Islam show clear relationships to pre existing modes of
ornament in the Late Antique Mediterranean and Middle East. Comparing
the continuous knot patterns in the mosaic floors of Byzantine churches in
Jordan with the famous bathhouse in the Umayyad palace complex of Khirbat
al Mafjar (dating to the 120S/740S) near Jericho, it is apparent that the latter
represents an expansion of scale rather than an elaboration in terms of the
structural complexity in the designs themselves. This reliance upon earlier
traditions is also seen in classicising vinescroll ornaments in other Umayyad

architectural ornament such as the carved limestone facade of the palace of
Mshatta in Jordan, probably dating to the late 120S/740S. 45

A decisive shift away from the systems of repeated ornament of the Late
Antique Mediterranean occurred in Iraq during the third/ninth century. This
change is seen best in the stucco decoration applied to the palaces and houses
of the c Abbasid capital, Samarra 3 . Three main styles of stucco were isolated in
the excavations at Samarra 1 . The first style (also seen in the earlier 'Abbasid
palaces at Raqqa in Syria) is a debased form of Late Antique vegetal scroll
which exhibits a tendency to standardise and repeat the forms of the leaves,
tendrils and fruit. This process is intensified in the second style where the
naturalistic forms are entirely subordinated to the larger geometric forms
arranged symmetrically in each panel. In both styles the foreground details are
clearly distinguished from the deeply carved and drilled background. In the
last style (often known as the 'bevelled style') this distinction between fore
ground and background is dissolved by cutting the stucco at a shallow angle. 46

This radical change may be attributed in part to the use of carved wooden
moulds that were pressed into the surface of the wet stucco a development
that greatly reduced the labour involved in ornamenting large spaces but its
significance is not merely technical in nature. The spatial ambiguity created by
the bevelled edges liberated craftsmen from the necessity to employ natural

istic motifs in their designs. One is no longer sure whether the sinuous shapes
derive from natural forms, and it also becomes difficult to establish where one
form ends and the new one begins. Most important is that these patterns have
the capacity for infinite repetition both along the horizontal and vertical
planes. The origins of the bevelled style remain obscure it may have come
from another medium such as leatherwork but there can be no doubt about
the popularity of the style in later centuries. Examples of bevelled style orna
ment can be found on architectural decoration and portable artefacts from
North Africa to Central Asia. 47

New forms of two and three dimensional geometric ornament also devel
oped in Islamic art and architecture. The most important types are geometric
interlace patterns (often known by the Persian word girih, meaning 'knot') and

45 Grabar, Formation, pp. 178 87, pi. 71, 119 3.

46 Maurice Dimand, 'Studies in Islamic ornament, II: The origin of the second style of
Samarra decoration', in Miles (ed.), Archaeologica orientalia; Creswell, Early Muslim
architecture, vol. II, pp. 286 8; Giilru Necipoglu, The Topkapi scroll: Geometry and orna
ment in Islamic architecture (Santa Monica, 1995), pp. 93 7.

47 Richard Ettinghausen, 'The "beveled style" in the post Samarra period', in Miles (ed.),
Archaeologica orientalia.

715

the muqarnas. Geometric strapwork patterns can be identified in the marble
window grilles of the Great Mosque of Damascus and the palace of Khirbat
al Mafjar, but these designs employ relatively simple threefold rotational
symmetry that is already found in ornamental panels on surviving Roman
Byzantine buildings in Syria. In the fifth /eleventh century in Iraq there
appears a new group of interlace designs based on much more sophisticated
geometric principles. Girih designs are first found on the frontispieces of
Qur'an manuscripts produced in Baghdad in the early fifth/ eleventh century.
Panels of complex geometric interlace are found later in the century on the
two mausolea at Kharraqan (46o/io67f and 486/1093) in Iran (pi. 25.13).
Comparable designs have been located at excavations of fifth/ eleventh and
sixth/ twelfth century domestic and palace structures in STraf, NTshapur, Rayy
(Iran), Tirmidh (Uzbekistan) and Lashkar i Bazar (Afghanistan). 4

Girih usually comprises star polygons combined with a range of convex
polygons in symmetrical arrangements. These shapes are separated from one
another by straps which often appear to be weaving under and over one
another. Like the bevelled style, these patterns possess the potential for
endless expansion. This expansion is governed by a strict geometric grid
based around two , three , four , or sixfold rotational symmetry around a
set of regularly spaced points. The imposition of a geometric grid does not
preclude the inclusion of curvilinear or vegetal components. A few examples
may be mentioned here to demonstrate the diverse application of these
principles. The frontispiece often known as 'carpet pages' of the seven
volume Qur'an of Baybars aljashnikir (pi. 25.11) shows how girih was
employed in the religious art of eighth/fourteenth century Egypt (strapwork
designs also appear on minbars, Qur] an boxes and other mosque furnishings).
Another variant on the girih is found in the elegant pierced marble screens of
the tomb of SalTm Chishti in the Indian city of Fatehpur Sikri (after
979/1571).
In this example the geometric designs carved in white marble are animated by
changing effects of the light. In the case of the Ben Yusuf madrasa (972./
1564?.)

in the Moroccan town of Marrakesh, the colour and texture of this lower band
of decoration contrasts with the delicately carved stucco ornament above.

Muqarnas is perhaps the most original and distinctive component of Islamic
architecture, though it remains difficult to provide the word with a single definition. A muqarnas may be a self supporting vault made of stone or wood,
a stucco structure hanging from a vault built of a more durable material, a
decorative addition onto a capital or a shallow niche in a facade. The

48 Negpoglu, The Topkapi scroll, pp. 97 109; Tabbaa, Transformation, pp. 73 102.

Islamic art and architecture

25.13 Detail of the earlier tomb at Kharraqan (46o/io6ji,). Photo: Andrew Marsham.

fundamental principle governing the composition of a muqarnas is the repeti
tion in rows of concave elements and other three dimensional geometric shapes in order to create a larger concave form. 49 The precursor of the muqarnas is the structural feature known as the squinch employed in the zones of transition within square planned domed buildings. Squinches are first

49 Tabbaa, Transformation, pp. 103 36.

The New Cambridge History of Islam

found in Sasanian buildings, but it was in the Islamic period that masons
learned to elaborate this structural feature by breaking it down into a series
of smaller concave and convex units. This process of spatial experimentation
is seen in the tomb of 'Arab Ata 1 at Tim (367/977^) and the sixth/twelfth
century domed chamber in the Great Mosque of Ardistan (pi. 25.5).

The earliest surviving muqarnas dome is to be found over the shrine of
Imam Dur, at the Iraqi town of Dur near Samarra' (478/1085^). The dome
surmounts a square brick base. The dramatic sculptural quality of the exterior
belies the delicacy and complexity of the muqarnas dome within. The con
fidence of the execution of the muqarnas on this provincial monument indi
cates that the experimental phase of the muqarnas occurred elsewhere in
earlier decades. The vogue for muqarnas vaulting soon spread around the
Islamic world and beyond its borders. For instance, the palace chapel of the
Norman king Roger II in Palermo still possesses its painted wooden stalactite
vault (completed c. 534/1140).

The entrance portal of the bimaristan (hospital) built by Nur al Din in
Damascus (549/1154^ is a good illustration of the varied application of
muqarnas in this period (pi. 25.6). Above the gate is a shallow vault constructed
of stucco. The lowest register is composed of a row of niches with cusped
arches alternating with the colonettes that support the undulating honeycomb
structure above. The portal leads to a vestibule that, itself, is covered by a tall
wood and stucco muqarnas dome. Girih is also represented on the portal of
the bimaristan on the bronze doors of the entranceway. Probably the most
sophisticated of all the later muqarnas vaults are to be found in the Alhambra
palace in Granada, Spain. The Hall of the Two Sisters constructed by the

Nasrid ruler Yusuf I (r. 733 55/1333 54) comprises a square base with an octagonal zone of transition and a dome above. Carved and painted stucco
muqarnas vaulting is employed to dazzling effect both in the dome and in the
squinches and arches of the zone of transition.

It seems likely that the evolutionary leap represented by girih and muqarnas
was a product of developments in geometry, and other areas of mathematics,
in the fourth/tenth and fifth/ eleventh centuries. Manuals of practical geom
etry designed for craftsmen also appear in this period. Masons, tile cutters and
stucco workers also compiled 'pattern books' with the different geometric designs they employed in their crafts, though few survive today. The most
impressive manuscript of this type is a ninth/fifteenth century scroll now in
the Topkapi Saray Museum, Istanbul. Probably produced for a Timurid patron in Central Asia, and never intended for practical use, this elegant work contains examples of inscription panels and two dimensional rectilinear

718

brick patterns and geometric interlace designs as well as diagrammatic repre
sentations of muqarnas vaulting. 50

Other modes of repeated decoration can be found in Islamic art. The introduction of the bevelled style did not spell the end of the classicising modes of vegetal ornament. Vinescrolls, acanthus leaf and other vegetal patterns continued to be employed in Islamic lands. For instance, examples
of intricate inhabited vinescroll designs containing both human and animal

representations are found in the carved ivory panels made in Fatimid Egypt
(358 567/969 1171) and the ivory pyxides produced for the Spanish Umayyad
court (138 422/756 1031). 51 Vegetal forms are often employed as a means to
subdivide the decorated space into a series of roundels, but individual leaves
are usually distorted in order to fill spaces in the compositions. This tendency
to subordinate vegetal ornament to the requirements of the larger pattern
remains a common theme in later Islamic decoration. The frontispieces of the
multi volume Mamluk and Ilkhanid Qur'ans are dominated by the epigraphic
component and the girih in the central panels, but closer examination often
reveals stylised leaves, tendrils and flowers in the polygonal panels created by
the geometric interlace. 52 The inscriptions on the inlaid brass basin made for
the Mamluk sultan al Nasir Muhammad in around 730/1330 (pi. 25.12) have
been discussed above, but attention may also be drawn to the supporting role
performed by the dense foliage that fills much of the remaining space on the
interior and exterior. In addition, the craftsmen recognised visual ambiguities
inherent in the leaf forms and transformed some into ducks and geese.

Commemorative art and architecture

Commemoration has played an important role in Islamic art and architecture
from the earliest periods. The spear (c anaza) that was driven into the ground
where the Prophet Muhammad stood in the mosque in Medina remained in
the prayer hall of the building in the decades following his death, and is even
represented on a coin minted in 76/695f 53 The Dome of the Rock illustrates
the adoption of the centrally planned Roman Byzantine martyrium into
Islamic architecture. Moving to the present, Muslim families in the Middle

East sometimes commission paintings of Mecca and Medina for the exterior

50 Necipoglu, The Topkapi scroll, pp. 231 347.

51 Contadini, Fatimid art, pp. 109 11; Francisco Prado Vilar, 'Circular visions of fertility and
punishment: Caliphal ivory caskets from al Andalus', Muqarnas, 14 (1997).

52 James, Qur'ans; Atil, Renaissance of Islam, pp. 24 48.

53 Miles, 'Mihrab'.

719

The New Cambridge History of Islam

walls of their houses after a member of the household has performed the hajj,
and it is still common practice for Muslims visiting the Shfite shrines of
al Husayn ibn 'All at Karbala 1 and Imam Rida at Mashhad to purchase
decorated clay tablets (sing, muhr) in commemoration of their
pilgrimage.

Citing the authority of the Prophet, the four schools (sing, madhhab) of
Sunni Muslim law generally opposed the veneration of tombs and the con
struction of edifices over places of burial. The austerity of Muslim practices
of interment seems, therefore, at odds with the growth of funerary architec
ture around the Islamic world. The domed structure known as Qubbat
al Sulaybiyya in the Iraqi city of Samarra 3 (c. 248/862) is perhaps the earliest
mausoleum to survive, and may be the resting place of three of the Abbasid
caliphs. The octagonal plan of the structure brings to mind the Dome of the
Rock. The early fourth/tenth century tomb of Isma'il the Samanid in Bukhara
(Uzbekistan) is a key example in the subsequent evolution of the Islamic

mausoleum. Constructed of baked brick, the domed building is square in plan
with slightly tapering walls, each pierced by an arched entrance. The interior
and exterior surfaces are animated by decorative brick courses and cut brick
patterns. Later mausolea to adopt the square plan with the dome include the
undated Fatimid tombs in the southern Egyptian town of Aswan, the Ghaznavid structure at Sangbast in Iran (possibly for Arslan Jadhib: early fifth/ eleventh century) and those dedicated to Sultan Sanjar in Marw in Turkmenistan (c. 444/1152) and Imam Shafi'i in Cairo (614/1217).

Other solutions were found to the design of the mausoleum, though most retained the concepts of the centralised plan with a dome or conical roof. Perhaps the most dramatic of all the early Islamic mausolea is Gunbad i Qabus
(397/ioo6f) near to the Iranian town of Jurjan. Located on a slight rise in the
land, the tower has a circular shaft surrounded by ten angular projections and
a tall, conical roof. The two brick mausolea at Kharraqan (46o/io67f and 486/
1093) have octagonal plans with rounded corner buttresses and double shell
domes (pi. 25.13). 54 Variants of the polygonal plan tower seen in later Iranian
mausolea include Gunbad i Qabud in Maragha (593/11961) and Bastam (7o8/i3o8f).

Monumental tombs could become a major focus of imperial patronage. This phenomenon can be illustrated by two famous examples. Constructed
with an octagonal domed chamber with a smaller rectangular chamber to the
south, the mausoleum of the Ilkhanid ruler Oljaytu in Sultaniyya (c. 710 16/
1310 16) picks up on the themes noted in the previous examples but lends

54 David Stronach and T. Cuyler Young, 'Three Seljuq tomb towers', Iran, 4 (1966).

them a greater scale and magnificence. The interior appears to have been
decorated twice, with the earlier layer of ornamental brickwork, glazed tile
and carved stucco and terracotta largely obliterated by a second skin of plaster
painted with inscriptions and geometric designs. It has been suggested that the
first phase of decoration, containing the repeated pairing of the names of
Muhammad and 'All, was covered up because the ruler switched his allegiance
from Shi'ite to Sunni Islam in the last years of his life. 55 Another imperially
sponsored mausoleum, the Taj Mahal in Agra (completed 1057/ 1647), has
a very different history. Commissioned by the Mughal ruler Shahjahan in
honour of his favourite wife, Mumtaz i Mahal, the domed mausoleum is
located at the north end of a large formal garden. The visual impact of the
monument is enhanced by the white marble cladding of the structure and the
delicate carved and inlaid decoration. The Qur'anic verses pick up on themes
of paradise and the Day of Judgement. Paradisaical themes are perhaps also to
be seen in the carvings of flowers (copied from European botanical illustra
tions) in the dadoes. 56

The life and actions of the Prophet Muhammad were matters of profound
interest to the Muslim community in the decades and centuries after his death.
His deeds and pronouncements (hadith) were assembled into written form in
the second/eighth and third/ninth centuries, while authors such as Ibn Ishaq
(d. 150/767) provided Muslim readers with biographies of the Prophet.
Despite the proliferation of this branch of Muslim literature, there appears
to have been no demand among the authors or the patrons of manuscripts to
complement the texts with illustrations. The first surviving images of the

Prophet occur in a series of manuscripts made for the Mongol (Ilkhanid) rulers
of Iran; their presence at this time is perhaps explained by the fact that the
Mongols were new converts to Islam. Significantly, the illustrations are not
found in collections of hadith or biographies, but in historical works such as the
JamV al tawankh (Compendium of histories), written in the Iranian city of
Tabriz by the powerful vizier Rashid al Din (d. 718/1318). Another group of
images is contained in a manuscript of al BTrum's (d. 439/1048) Athar al baqiya
(Chronologies of ancient nations) dating to 707 7 'i307f 57 The painting of the

55 Eleanor Sims, 'The "iconography" of the internal decoration of the mausoleum of
Uljaytu at Sultaniyya', in Soucek (ed.), Content and context.

56 Catherine Asher, The Cambridge history of India, vol. 1. 4: Architecture of Mughal India,
(Cambridge, 1992), pp. 209 15.

57 Robert Hillenbrand, 'Images of Muhammad in al Biruni's "Chronology of ancient
nations'", in Robert Hillenbrand (ed.), Persian fainting from the Mongols to the Qajars:
Studies in honour ofB. W. Robinson (London and New York, 2000).

721

The New Cambridge History of Islam

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25.14 Investiture of 'Ah, Ghadir Khumm, from al Birum, Athar al baqiya (zoy/yo/f.), Arab
161 f. i62r. By permission of Edinburgh University Library.

investiture of 'All at Ghadir Khumm (pi. 25.14) creates a symmetrical compo
sition of figures in the foreground with a landscape behind. Though the poses
of the figures are rather static, the raised arm of the Prophet as he grasps 'All's
shoulder and the direct exchange of glances between the two introduces a
sense of drama to the scene. Depictions of Muhammad, often accompanied by
angels and other heavenly figures, also appear in the painted manuscripts of
the Timurid (771 912/1370 1506) and Safavid (907 1145/1501 1732) periods
detailing the Prophet's mystical journey (mfraj). Mi'raj literature evidently

722

Islamic art and architecture

stimulated the imaginations of the illustrators, and resulted in some of the
most vibrant compositions in the tradition of Persian painting. 5

Cultural interaction

The Islamic world continued to be influenced by Graeco Roman art and intellectual culture from the first contacts with the Byzantine empire in the
first/ seventh century through to the fall of Constantinople in 857/1453. Byzantine mosaicists were sent by the Byzantine emperor to work on the decoration of caliph al Walid's mosques in Damascus and Medina, and Muslim writers also claim that in the fourth /tenth century the emperor Nikephoros Phokas acquiesced to a request sent by the Spanish caliph al Hakam II for mosaicists to work on the Great Mosque of Cordoba. 59 In
337/948f. another diplomatic exchange resulted in the dispatch to Cordoba of
an illustrated manuscript of the herbal (commonly known as De materia medica, and in Arabic as Kitab al hasha'isK) of the first century botanist and
physician Pedanius Dioscorides. Translations of this famous Antique Greek
text were made in the Middle East, and lavishly illustrated versions survive
from the seventh/thirteenth to the tenth/ sixteenth centuries. ° Other Greek
medical and scientific texts were translated and illustrated in the Middle East
during this period, while some authors also assembled compilations of improving anecdotes drawn from the Classical past. An early seventh/ thirteenth century copy of al Mubashshir ibn Fatiks Mukhtar al hikam (Selection of wise sayings, 445/1048^) contains a frontispiece with depictions
of six Antique scholars. J While this convention of representing a scholarly
debate can be traced back to Late Antique manuscripts such as the herbal
made for the sixth century Byzantine princess Juliana Anicia, the Islamic artist
gives the genre a new twist by arranging the scholars symmetrically within a
simple girih pattern.

58 Marie Rose Seguy, The miraculous journey of Mahomet /Miraj nameh (New York, 1977);
Oleg Grabar, Mostly miniatures: An introduction to Persian painting (Princeton, 2000),
pp. 91 6; Eleanor Sims, Boris Marshak and Ernst Grube, Peerless images: Persian painting
and its sources (New Haven and London, 2002), pp. 147 52.

59 El Cheikh, Byzantium, pp. 56 60.

60 Minta Collins, Medieval herhals: The illustrative traditions (London and Toronto, 2000),

PP- 31 147-

61 Richard Ettinghausen, Arab painting (Geneva, 1962), pp. 75 7; Eva Hoffman, 'The author
portrait in thirteenth century Arabic manuscripts: A new Islamic context for a Late
Antique tradition', Muqamas, 10 (1993), pp. 6 8.

723

The New Cambridge History of Islam

The exchange of paintings and other forms of visual imagery also
had an impact on Islamic art in later periods. The Ottoman sultans Mehmed II
(r. 849/i444f and 855 86/1451 81) and Siileyman I both commissioned art works
from Europe, while the Persian painter Muhammad Zaman (ft. 1059 1116/
1649 1704) produced paintings of Old Testament scenes that drew inspiration
from imported Flemish and Italian prints. 2 The interaction between different
cultures was not always benign in character, however. For instance, the
Quwwat al Islam mosque in Delhi, and other Ghurid religious monuments
in India and Pakistan, made conspicuous use of spolia from destroyed Hindu
and Jain temples as trophies of victory. These complex issues cannot be
addressed in detail here, but one important area of cultural interaction will be
discussed: the relationship between the Islamic world and China.

The inclusion of Chinese porcelain bowls into the tenth/sixteenth century
mihrab of the al Shawadhina mosque (pi. 25.9) provides a revealing insight into

the value accorded to this type of imported commodity in the medieval
Islamic world. Chinese ceramics have been found in other stucco mihrabs
in
Oman, but the practice does not appear to be known elsewhere. It is
clear
that the conspicuous presence of these imported items in a mihrab
reflects the
economic and cultural importance of international maritime trade to the
coastal populations around the Persian Gulf. Excavations in the Gulf have
shown that Chinese ceramics, as well as a wide range of other
commodities
from India and South East Asia, were being imported into the Middle
East
throughout the Islamic period.

Economic contact with China was to have a far reaching influence upon
the
development of the arts in the Islamic world. For instance, paper was
manu
factured in China long before the appearance of the first paper mills in
Samarqand and Baghdad in the second half of the second/ eighth
century. 63
As important as specific technological borrowings was the elevated
status
accorded in Islamic literature to the craftsmen of China; imported
Chinese
objects set standards of manufacture and decoration against which
Islamic
craftsmen could measure themselves. This was particularly true in the
case of
pottery production. Those with sufficient wealth often chose to amass
collec
tions of Chinese celadons and porcelains one of the world's greatest

62 Topkapi Museum, The sultan's portrait: Picturing the house of Osman
(Istanbul, 2000),
pp. 64 109; Eleanor Sims, 'Towards a monograph on the 17th century
Iranian painter
Muhammad Zaman ibn Haji Yusuf , Islamic Art, 5 (2001).

63 Jonathan Bloom, Paper before print: The history and impact of paper
in tfte Islamic world
(New Haven and London, 2001), pp. 42 5.

collections of Chinese pottery was assembled by the Ottoman sultans and remains in the Topkapi Saray in Istanbul but there was always a ready market for cheaper local copies. Literary sources and archaeological research attest to the import of T'ang dynasty (618 906) sancai (three colour) and white wares in the second/ eighth century, though this trade intensified from the third/ninth century. By the last quarter of the second/eighth century potters in Iraq were not only imitating aspects of the vessel shape and glaze colours of the Chinese vessels but also incorporating new features such as slip incised (sgraffito) decoration and Arabic inscriptions painted in cobalt on opaque white glaze. 64

Perhaps the most influential of all the types of Chinese pottery was blue and white porcelain. Cobalt had been used to create blue glazes in the Tang period, but it was not until the Yuan dynasty (c. 678 770/1279 1368) that the technique of painting this pigment under the glaze was perfected. 65 Chinese blue and white wares of the eighth/fourteenth and ninth/ fifteenth centuries are painted with delicate wave and cloud designs and lotus, prunus and chrysanthemum blossoms, as well as birds and animals. In response to the aesthetic challenge posed by the porcelain body Islamic potters developed a new type of white ceramic, known as stonepaste or frit ware, composed of pale clay mixed with finely ground quartz and glass (or glass frit). This technological development allowed the skilled potters of the Middle East to paint in cobalt (sometimes with other colours such as turquoise, green and black) beneath a colourless glaze. The underglaze painted stonepaste wares of

the Ilkhanid, Mamluk (648 922/1250 1517) and Timurid (771 912/1370 1506)
domains illustrate the range of artistic responses. 67 Some surviving examples
are almost exact replicas of Chinese prototypes but, more commonly, one encounters the introduction of Islamic themes such as epigraphy and geo metric patterns. Perhaps the finest of all such stonepaste wares were produced
in the Turkish town of Iznik during the late ninth/ fifteenth and tenth/ sixteenth centuries. Though the potters of Iznik produced glazed wares with

64 Lane, Early Islamic pottery, pp. 10 16; Alastair Northedge and Derek Kennet, 'The
Samarra horizon', in Ernst Grube (ed.), Cobalt and lustre: The first centuries of Islamic
pottery, Nasser D. Khalili Collection of Islamic Art 9 (London, 1994); Anne Marie
Bernsted, Early Islamic pottery: Materials and techniques (London, 2003), pp. 2 7.

65 John Carswell, Blue and white: Chinese porcelain around the world (London, 2000),
pp. 79 105.

66 Bernsted, Early Islamic pottery, pp. 23 8.

67 Arthur Lane, Later Islamic pottery (London, 1957), pp. 1 67; Atil, Renaissance of Islam,
pp. 146 92; Lisa Golombek, Robert Mason and Gauvin Bailey, Tamerlane's tableware: A
new approach to chinoiserie ceramics of fifteenth and sixteenth century Iran (Costa Mesa,
1996)-

725

polychromatic painting, they also exploited the visual possibilities of the more
restricted palette of cobalt blue and white (sometimes with the addition of
turquoise). The same techniques were also employed in the production of
tiles. Among the most magnificent are the tenth/ sixteenth century pair of tiles
(each over a metre high) made for the circumcision room (Siinnet Odasi) in
the Topkapi Saray in Istanbul (pi. 23.13). 69

The influence of Chinese scroll painting can be found in the early eighth/
fourteenth century Ilkhanid manuscripts produced in Iran and Iraq. 70 The
illustration from al Birunfs Athar al baqiya (pi. 25.14) provides an example of
the way in which Persian painters sought to combine aspects of Middle
Eastern and Chinese aesthetic conventions. The figures in the foreground
are defined in sharp lines and solid areas of pigment, but the landscape
including the gnarled trees and gold edged clouds is painted using more
diffuse washes of colour in a more Chinese manner. Imported Chinese
ceramics, silk and carved lacquer also had an impact upon arts further west
during the eighth/fourteenth century. 71 Chinoiserie designs have been noted
on the decoration of the Egyptian inlaid brass basin made in around 730/1330
(pi. 25.12) and the carving of the mausoleum complex of sultan al Nasir
al Hasan in Cairo (757 64/1356 63), but they can also be found in the decorated
pages of the lavish Qur'ans produced for wealthy patrons in Egypt, Syria, Iraq
and Iran at this time.

Urban life

It was in the towns and cities of the Islamic world that the finest craftsmen
congregated. Craftsmen were often organised into workshops, either directly
under the control of a royal court or, more typically, as commercial enter
prises undertaking a wide range of commissions for the open market. These
urban workshops were almost exclusively populated by men. This is not to
suggest, of course, that women were not involved in craft activities; the roles

68 Nurhan Atasoy and Julian Raby, Iznik: The pottery of Ottoman Turkey (London, 1989),
pp. 121 8.

69 Giilru Necipoglu, 'From international Timurid to Ottoman: A change in taste in
sixteenth century ceramic tiles', Muqarnas, 7 (1990), pp. 148 53.

70 Basil Gray, Persian painting (Cleveland, 1961), pp. 19 55; Sims, Marshak and Grube,
Peerless images, pp. 41 50; Robert Hillenbrand, 'The arts of the illustrated book in
Ilkhanid Iran', in Linda Komaroff and Stefano Carboni (eds.), Tfie legacy of Genghis
Khan: Courtly art and culture in Western Asia, 1256 13% (New Haven and London, 2002).

71 Linda Komaroff, 'The transmission and dissemination of a new visual language', in
Komaroff and Carboni (eds.), Legacy.

726

Islamic art and architecture

25.15 Glazed tiles from the circumcision room, Topkapi Saray, Istanbul (tenth /sixteenth
century). Photo: Marcus Milwright.

performed by women in urban areas tended to be those that could be done
within the domestic environment, such as dyeing and weaving.

In the famous Muqaddima (the prolegomenon to his universal history), the
North African polymath Ibn Khaldun (d. 808/1406) provides a list of the

72-7

'crafts' (sing, sina'a) that are either 'noble' (sharlj) or simply 'necessary' (damn)
to the functioning of a town or city. Interestingly, his definition of 'craft'
comprising activities ranging from tailoring, book production, writing and
architecture to agriculture and midwifery is much wider than would
normally be applied to the word today. Though he acknowledges the crafts
as a fundamental component of urban life, it is clear that neither Ibn Khaldun
nor other contemporary Muslim scholars held the practitioners of the crafts in
high esteem. 72 Perhaps the most telling evidence concerning the socio
economic status of craftsmen in traditional Islamic society is their virtual
invisibility in the historical, geographical, biographical and poetic works
written prior to the tenth/ sixteenth century.

The calligraphers responsible for producing copies of the Qur] an are
among the few skilled artisans about whom we possess much biographical
information. The best calligraphers were highly paid for their skills, and
particular attention was given to those individuals who either developed
new scripts or mastered many different forms of script. 73 It is from the
Persian cultural milieu that we have one of the first attempts to describe
the activities of the principal painters of the age, written in 951/1544 by the
calligrapher and illuminator Dust Muhammad. 74 It is not possible to attribute
specific manuscript illustrations to all of the masters that appear in his list, but
some, like Kamal al Din Bihzad (d. 942/1536) and Mir Musavvir (fi. tenth/
sixteenth century), are still counted among the finest exponents of Persian

painting. A further example of this genre was penned by a Persian, Qadi Ahmad, in around 1015/ 1606.

The greater survival of official archives from Ottoman Turkey and Safavid
Iran also allows us to reconstruct aspects of the organisation of guilds and
individual workshops responsible for the production of luxury goods for the
court. 75 Our knowledge of the status and activities of craftsmen in earlier
periods comes largely from another source: inscriptions on objects. The names of master craftsmen start to appear on Islamic metalwork and glazed
pottery from the latter part of the second/ eighth century, 76 though it should

72 'Abd al Rahman ibn Muhammad ibn Khaldun, The Muqaddimah: An introduction to
history, trans. Franz Rosenthal, 3 vols. (New York, 1958), vol. II, pp. 346S.

73 James, Qur'ans; Robert Irwin, Islamic art (London, 1997), pp. 177 81; Tabbaa,
Transformation, pp. 34 52.

74 David Roxburgh, Prefacing the image: The writing of art history in sixteenth century Iran,
Studies and Sources in Islamic Art and Architecture 9 (Leiden and Boston, 2001),
pp. 160 208.

75 Irwin, Islamic art, pp. 133 41.

76 Blair, Islamic inscriptions, pp. 117 19, 150 2.

728

Islamic art and architecture

be recognised that they are never a common feature on the objects produced
in any period. Occasionally further details about the organisation of work shops and familial links may be inferred from these 'signatures'. For instance,
the names of both Ghaybi al Tawrizi and his son, Ibn Ghaybi, have been found
on pottery vessels (sometimes even on the same object) and glazed tiles of the
ninth/fifteenth century in Egypt and Syria. In some cases we can also trace the
movement of skilled craftsmen through the distinctive final component (nisba)
of their personal names that identifies the place of birth. Signatures of potters
working in eighth/fourteenth and ninth/fifteenth century Cairo include the
nisbas 'Ajami ('the Persian') and Shami ('of Damascus') as well as titles such as
Ustad al Misri ('Egyptian master'). 77 Rarely, craftsmen, or the workshops they
controlled, diversified into different materials and techniques. The metal worker Muhammad ibn al Zayn placed his name no fewer than six times on
his masterpiece, the late seventh /thirteenth century inlaid brass basin known
as the Baptistere de Saint Louis. His signature has been found on other inlaid
vessels, but it has also been identified on a set of steel gates from a religious
institution in Jerusalem. 78

Cities and towns often became centres specialising in the production of a specific medium. The study of glazed ceramics one of the most creative aspects of Islamic visual culture has revealed numerous distinctive styles of
glazed pottery production. One of the most challenging techniques was lustre
painting. This difficult and costly process was designed to leave an extremely
thin metallic deposit (composed of silver and copper) on the surface of a glazed vessel. 79 Lustre decoration was first employed on pottery in southern
Iraq in the early third/ninth century, and was later promoted in Cairo during
the period of Fatimid rule. While lustre painted glazed pottery only comprised
a small proportion of the ceramics manufactured in Cairo at this time, they do

appear to have been the most highly valued, and have been recovered from
excavations all around the Mediterranean basin. ° Dating to the fifth/eleventh
century, this elegant storage jar (pi. 25.16) is painted with golden lustre over an
opaque white glaze. The decorative scheme combines bands of knotwork, geometric motifs, stylised vegetation and fish.

77 Marilyn Jenkins, 'Mamluk underglaze painted pottery: Foundations for further study',
Muqarnas, 2 (1984), pp. 104 12.

78 James Allan, 'Muhammad ibn al Zain: Craftsman in cups, thrones and window grilles?',
Levant, 28 (1996).

79 Alan Caiger Smith, Lustre pottery: Technique, tradition and innovation in Islam and the
Western world (London, 1985), pp. 197 220; Bernsted, Early Islamic pottery, pp. 7 n.

80 Marilyn Jenkins, 'Sa'd: content and context', in Soucek (ed.), Content and context;
Contadini, Fatimid art, pp. 71 89.

729

25.16 Lustre painted and glazed ceramic jar, Egypt (fifth /eleventh century), C.48 1952. By
permission of the Board of Trustees of the Victoria and Albert Museum.

In the sixth /twelfth century other centres for lustre production sprang up in
Syria, southern Anatolia and Iran. The delicate style of lustre painting on the
mihrab signed by Hasan ibn Arabshah Naqqash is also found on the glazed
ceramic bowls, platters and ewers produced in Kashan during the late sixth/
twelfth and early seventh/thirteenth centuries. The names of several painters
have been identified on surviving examples. The potters of Kashan also
perfected another decorative style (mina'T) involving the use of enamel pig
ments that were fired onto the surface of a white bodied ceramic covered with
a transparent glaze. This technique allowed the potters to combine fine detail
with a polychromatic palette (pi. 25.17). This delicate beaker comprises three

730

Islamic art and architecture

25.17 Overglaze painted glazed ceramic beaker, Kashan, Iran (late sixth/twelfth or early
seventh /thirteenth century), Purchase F1928.2. By permission of the Freer Gallery of Art,
Smithsonian Institution, Washington, DC.

friezes running around the exterior, each containing narrative scenes. The
style of painting found on mina'l ware exhibits strong similarities to modes of
representation found in manuscript painting, and in the case of the beaker it is

possible to identify the source of the narrative as Firdawsi's epic poem, the
Shahnama (Book of kings, composed c. 400/1010).

This process of regional specialisation can also be seen in metalwork. The
late sixth/twelfth and early seventh/thirteenth centuries were a period of
great creativity in the field of inlaid metalwork. Numerous manufacturing
centres have been identified in Afghanistan, north east Iran, Iraq, Syria and
south east Turkey. The nisba al Mawsili ('of Mosul 1 , the city in north west

81 Lane, Early Islamic pottery, pp. 41 3; Marianna Simpson, 'The narrative structure of a
medieval Iranian beaker', Ars Orientalis (1981).

731

Iraq) has been identified on the inscriptions on twenty eight surviving metal
objects. Interestingly, the nisba refers to the craftsman and does not signify the
place where the object was actually made. In fact, only one of these vessels
an inlaid copper alloy vessel (known as the Blacas ewer) by the craftsman
Shuja c ibn Man'a, and dated 629/1232 specifies Mosul as the place of
manufacture. 2 The repeat patterns and geometric interlace on the Blacas
ewer provide a visual contrast to the elegant inscription bands and the scenes
in the main roundels. Craftsmen might choose to move to another locality in
search of wealthier clients, but their movement could also be dictated by
external factors such as impending military threat or natural disaster. 3 These

skilled craftsmen adapted themselves to the different tastes of new patrons;
some inlaid metal vessels produced in Syria during this period even contain
images of Christian saints and scenes from the life of Christ. 84

Those who operated their own workshops might undertake commissions
for members of the political elite, but it is also clear that they served a more
diverse urban clientele, including groups such as administrators, scholars and
merchants. An inlaid bronze vessel made in the Afghan city of Herat in 559/
1163 carries an inscription that names the recipient as 'the brilliant khwdja,
Rukn al Din, pride of the merchants, the most trustworthy of the faithful,
grace of the pilgrimage and the two shrines, Rashid al Din c Azizi Abu
al Husayn al Zanjani, may his glory last'. Known as the Bobrinski bucket,
this vessel is significant because it carries the earliest example of the name (and
grandiose titles) of a merchant to survive on an Islamic artefact. From this time
it is possible to detect the ways in which paintings and portable artefacts
sought to address the concerns of this affluent, and increasingly self confident,
merchant class. 85

This new direction in Islamic art can be seen in the illustrated manuscripts
of the Maqdmdt (Assemblies) of al Hariri (d. 516/1122) produced in Syria and
Iraq during the seventh/thirteenth and eighth/fourteenth centuries. The
fifty stories contained in the Maqdmdt are narrated by a trader, al Harith, and
focus upon the activities of a scoundrel named Abu Zayd al Saruji. Many of the
stories take place in environments markeqjlace, mosque, caravanserai,

82 Rachel Ward, Islamic metalwork (London, 1993), pp. 80 4.

83 James Allan, Islamic metalwork: The Nuhad es Said collection (London, 1982), pp. 58 73,
nos. 7 10.

84 Eva Baer, Ayyuhid metalwork with Christian images (Leiden, 1989).

85 Ward, Islamic metalwork, pp. 74 5.

86 Oleg Grabar, The illustrations of the Maqamat (Chicago, 1984); Shirley Guthrie, Arab
social life in the Middle Ages: An illustrated study (London, 1995).

countryside, aboard ship and so on that would have been familiar to merchants. One of the finest of the Maqatnat manuscripts was illustrated by
Yahya ibn Mahmud al Wasiti in 634/1237. His paintings are full of detailed
observation of everyday life and perceptive insights into human nature. The
illustration of Abu Zayd and al Harith approaching a village (pi. 25.18) exem
plifies his ability to encapsulate an environment with a few carefully chosen
details. In the foreground al Wasiti places the chief protagonists riding their
camels. Significantly, the illustrator pays considerable attention to the depic
tion of the different textiles. Cloth was one of the staples of Middle Eastern
trade, and the painter provides a visual feast of coloured and patterned textiles.
His desire to cater for the textile sensibility of his wealthy urban audience
leads al Wasiti, with some humour, to clothe even the villager holding a shovel in a bright red caftan ornamented with golden tiraz bands on the sleeves.

Palace life

The extant palaces of the Umayyad caliphs in Jordan, Syria and Palestine set

the tone for later developments in Islamic palace architecture. While some,
like the fresco painted bathhouse of Qusayr 'Amra in Jordan (c. 92 6/711 15),
are modest structures, there is a marked increase in scale and opulence in the
last decade of Umayyad rule. Most important are the palatial complex of
Khirbat al Mafjar near Jericho, with its elaborately decorated bathhouse, and
the enigmatic palace of Mshatta in northern Jordan. The latter palace is most
famous for its carved limestone frieze that runs the length of the 144 metre
entrance facade. 87 Scale, internal complexity and axiality are also key features
of the vast palaces built by the 'Abbasid caliphs in Samarra' in Iraq between
221/836 and 279/892. The cheap building materials employed at Samarra'
largely mud brick with stucco facing have contributed to the poor preser
vation of these once imposing structures. The same compromise between
the patron's desire for scale and the cost of building materials can also be seen
in the fifth/ eleventh century palaces of Lashkar i Bazar in Afghanistan. 89

87 Robert Hillenbrand, 'La dolce vita in early Islamic Syria', Art History, 5 (1982); Oleg
Grabar, 'Umayyad palaces reconsidered', in Giilru Necipoglu (ed.), Pre modern Islamic
palaces, Ars Orientalis, 23 (special issue) (1993).

88 See contributions by Alastair Northedge, Derek Kennet and Marcus Milwright in Chase
Robinson (ed.), A medieval Islamic city reconsidered: Interdisciplinary approaches to
Samarra, Oxford Studies in Islamic Art 14 (Oxford and New York, 2001).

89 Daniel Schlumberger, Lashkari Bazar: Une residence royale ghaznevide et ghoride
(Paris, 1978).

733

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25.18 Village scene, Maqamat of al Hariri (634/1237), Arabe 5847, fol. i38r. Bibliotheque
Nationale de France.

Islamic art and architecture

While it takes a considerable effort to imagine the original magnificence of
most palaces of the earlier Islamic centuries, some complexes of later periods
survive largely intact, including the Alhambra in Spain, the Safavid palaces in
Isfahan and the Topkapi palace of the Ottoman sultans in Istanbul (from 863/
1459). The concept of the Islamic palace is exemplified by the Alhambra,
located on top of a hill south of Granada. Built in numerous phases from
the fifth/ eleventh century, it was brought to its present form by the Nasrid
dynasty (r. 627 897/1230 1492). The forbidding exterior fortifications contrast
with the grace and delicacy of the architecture of the palace and the formal
gardens. Carved stucco patterns of great sophistication adorn many of
the walls, and the same medium is used to dazzling effect in the muqarnas
vaulting. The palace also contains lavish decoration made from cut tile, wood,

marble and painted leather. 90 Though many other media are also employed,
glazed tiles constitute the most conspicuous part of the decorative programme
within the many structures of the Topkapi. 91 Those that adorn the circum
cision room are a demonstration of technical virtuosity, and contain birds,
deer and flowing vegetal and floral designs painted in a palette of blue and
turquoise (pi. 25.15).

Royal patronage not only attracted the most skilled craftsmen, but
also encouraged the use of the most expensive materials. Throughout the
Islamic period extravagant objects were made from precious metals and
encrusted with gemstones, though only a tiny proportion of these artefacts
from before the tenth/ sixteenth century survives. The opulence, and some
times rather gaudy taste, of Islamic palace life in later centuries can be seen in
the embroidered silks, velvets, weapons and jewellery produced for the
Ottomans in Istanbul, the Safavids and Qajars (1193 1342/ 1779 1924) in Iran
and the Mughals (932 1274/1526 1858) in India. 91 For earlier dynasties it is
often necessary to turn to the written record to gain a picture of the luxury arts
and entertainments in the royal courts. 93 Historical sources relate that the
palaces of the Abbasids in third/ninth and early fourth/tenth century Iraq

90 See contributions by Dario Cabanelas Rodriguez, James Dickie, Jesus Bermuz Lopez
and Dede Fairchild Ruggles in Dodds (ed.), al Andalus; Oleg Grabar, The Alhambra
(Cambridge, MA, 1978).

91 Giilru Necipoglu, Architecture, ceremonial and power: The Topkapi palace in the fifteenth and
sixteenth centuries (New York and Cambridge, MA, 1991).

92 For instance, see examples illustrated in Michael Piotrovsky and J. Michael Rogers
(eds.), Heaven on earth: Art from Islamic lands: Works from the State Hermitage Museum and

tfte Khalili Collection (Munich and Berlin, 2004), nos. 52 9, in 13, pp. 103 9, 162 83.

93 Ghada al Hijjawi Qaddumi (trans.), The hook of gifts and rarities: Kitab alhadaya wa
al tuhaf (Cambridge, MA, 1996), pp. 146 65.

735

were famed for their automata, and this tradition was also picked up by the
Umayyad caliphs in the palace complex of Madinat al Zahra' near Cordoba in
Spain (from 324/936). Sadly, no vestiges of these magnificent contraptions
survive, but comparable automata are illustrated in seventh/thirteenth and
eighth/fourteenth century copies of Abu al c Izz ibn Isma'il ibn al Razzaz
aljazarf s Kitabfi ma'rifat al hiyal al handasiyya (Book of knowledge of ingen
ious mechanical devices), composed before 602/ 1206. 94

The workshops attached to royal courts sometimes became centres of
excellence for specific media. For instance, Muslim dynasties often established
large textile workshops (sing, dar al tiraz) for the production of the high
quality cloth needed by the royal wardrobe. In the case of Fatimid Egypt this
industry can be reconstructed on the basis of written records and the embroi
dered inscriptions on the surviving textiles. 95 The Umayyad court in Spain is
particularly famous for its ivory containers. Ivory pyxides were employed for
the storage of perfumed substances such as musk and camphor, but their
carved decoration and inscription bands might also contain explicit or coded
messages for the recipient. One was commissioned in 353/964 as a gift for

Subh, the concubine of the caliph al Hakam II, to mark the birth of their son,
[Abd al Rahman. The decoration of the pyxis made for al Hakam's brother,
al Mughira, is more complex in character, and the original meaning attached
to the designs is uncertain. It has been suggested that the figural scenes within
the three large roundels on the body of the vessel may be read as a warning to
al Mughira not to interfere with the caliphal succession. 96

Some of the finest artefacts carved from rock crystal (the purest form of
quartz) were produced for the Fatimid court in Cairo. A few, such as the ewer
made for caliph al 'Aziz (r. 365 86/975 96) that is now in the treasury of San
Marco in Venice, carry the names of members of the court though, strangely,
many of the finest examples lack dedicatory inscriptions. Probably dated to the
early fifth/ eleventh century, the ewer illustrated in plate 25.19 exemplifies the
quality of Fatimid rock crystal carving. Notable features are the high degree of
stylisation in the drawing of the animals and plant forms and the subtle
balance maintained between the positive and negative spaces. The carving

94 Ettinghausen, Arab painting, pp. 93 6; Rachel Ward, 'Evidence for a school of painting at
the Artuqid court', in Julian Raby (ed.), The art of Syria and thejaztra, 1100 1250, Oxford
Studies in Islamic Art 1 (Oxford, 1985), pp. 69 76.

95 Contadini, Fatimid art, pp. 39 48.

96 Prado Vilar, 'Circular visions', pp. 21 9; Renata Holod, 'Pyxis of al Mughira', in Dodds
(ed.), al Andalus, pp. 192 7.

25.19 Rock crystal ewer, Egypt (early fifth/ eleventh century), 7904 1862. By permission of
the Board of Trustees of the Victoria and Albert Museum.

of the form and relief decoration of this vessel required immense skill and
relies upon the great resilience of the material; the body of the vessel is only
1.7 2 millimetres thick. 97 The same carving technique was employed in the
manufacture of glass beakers and ewers in this period. 98

97 Avinoam Shalem, Islam Christianized: Islamic portable objects in medieval church treasuries
of the Latin West, Ars Faciendi 7 (Frankfurt am Main, 1996), pp. 56 63; Contadini, Fatimid
art, pp. 16 38.

98 Shalem, Islam Christianized, pp. 113 15; David Whitehouse, 'Cut and engraved glass', in
Stefano Carboni and David Whitehouse (eds.), Glass of the sultans (New York, 2002),
PP- 155 97-

737

Muslim rulers were also great patrons of illustrated manuscripts, and

numerous court workshops have been identified. In some cases royal patron
age was announced in the form of a painted frontispiece depicting the patron.
The frontispieces of a multi volume copy of Abu al Faraj al Isfahams (d. 356/
967) Kitab al aghani (Book of songs) dating to 6i5/i2i8f. each contain repre
sentations of the prince of Mosul, Badr al Din Lu J lu\ attended by members of
his court. Enthroned rulers can be found on the frontispieces of copies of the
Kitab al diryaq (Book of antidotes) of Pseudo Galen and the Maqamat of
al Hariri produced in Iraq, Egypt and Syria during the seventh/thirteenth
and eighth/fourteenth centuries." Other texts, most notably the manuscripts
of Firdawsf s Shahnama produced during the Ilkhanid, Timurid and Safavid
periods, 100 dealt directly with royal themes and provided illustrators with the
opportunity to examine different aspects of the representation of authority.
This epic poem details the lives of the rulers of Iran from the dawn of time to
the death of the last Sasanian shah in 30/651 and, predictably, many of the
paintings found in the extant manuscripts are enthronement scenes. One of
the most elegant examples of this genre is the depiction of the court of the
mythical first king of Iran, Gayumars, in the Shahnama produced for the
Safavid shah Tahmasp dating to around 931 42/1525 35. Io: Evoking an age
before the invention of architecture, the fur clad king and his court sit within a
rocky amphitheatre set against a golden sky dotted with ornate chinoiserie
clouds.

The illustrations of the Shahnama are not limited to enthronements, how
ever; other themes relating to royalty courtly love, battles and succession
were also approached. For instance, death is a particularly conspicuous theme
within the so called Great Mongol Shahnama (c. 735 6/1335 6), and images
such as 'the mourning of Alexander the Great' and 'the bier of Isfandiyar'
possess a degree of emotionalism seldom seen in Persian painting. 102

99 Ettinghausen, Arab painting, pp. 83 6, 90 2, 147 9; Atil, Renaissance of Islam, pp. 258 9,
%■ 5-

100 Marie Swietochowski, 'The Metropolitan Museum of Art's Small Shahnama', in Marie
Swietochowski and Stefano Carboni (eds.), Illustrated poetry and epic images: Persian
painting of the 1330s and 1340s (New York, 1994); Grabar, Mostly miniatures, pp. 99 104;
Sims, Marshak and Grube, Peerless images, pp. 302 15.

101 Stuart Cary Welch, A king's book of kings: The Shah nameh of Shah Tahmasp
(New York, 1972), pp. 88 91, no. 20; Sims, Marshak and Grube, Peerless images,
pp. 63 4-

102 Oleg Grabar and Sheila Blair, Epic images and contemporary history: The illustrations of the
Great Mongol Shah nama (Chicago, 1980), pp. 18 19, 22 3; Sims, Marshak and Grube,
Peerless images, pp. 45 6.

738

Islamic art and architecture

Conventions of depicting royalty could be subverted both in the illustrations
of the Shahnama and other works. The Persian painter Bihzad provides a
surprising image of the c Abbasid caliph Harun al Rashid (r. 170 93/786 809) in
the bathhouse in the copy of the Khamsa (Five poems) of Nizami (d. 605/1209)
completed in 899/1494 (pi. 25.20). 103 The caliph is stripped of all the trappings
of authority (his robes and crown are unceremoniously piled on a bench in the

changing room to the right) and depicted naked to the waist and sitting cross
legged on the floor. In perhaps the most audacious touch, the artist allows a
humble detail, the patterned towels in the upper part of the painting, to
become one of the dominant visual elements of the composition.

Villagers and nomads

The artistic achievements of the sedentary and nomadic groups in rural
regions of the Islamic world have tended to be the domain of archaeological
study, supplemented by the ethnographic observations of traditional craft
activities. Rural areas tend to support craft activities that do not need large
amounts of costly equipment and can be performed in, or near, the home. For
instance, al Wasifi's illustration of an Iraqi village from the Maqamat manu
script of 634/1237 shows a woman using a spindle (pi. 25.18). She makes use of a
simple and effective technology still employed by Bedouin women in the
Middle East. Pottery vessels, textiles, fiat weave rugs, knotted carpets, tents,
basketry, reed mats and leather were all types of portable artefacts that could
be produced by villagers and pastoral nomads around the Islamic world. Two
examples are chosen here to illustrate some of the major themes.

Excavations of villages in the Middle East often bring to light small numbers
of shards of decorated and glazed ceramic vessels imported from urban
centres, but it is clear that other types of pottery were also produced in the
villages themselves. A particularly important development occurred in the
south of Jordan in the fifth/ eleventh century. In this region the potters
abandoned the use of the kick wheel the standard tool used for forming
pottery in urban workshops in favour of constructing vessels out of coils of
clay that were smoothed into shape by hand. Within a few decades this
rudimentary technology had spread all over Jordan, Palestine and Syria. 104

103 For the works of Bihzad see Ebadollah Bahari, Behzad: Master of
Persian painting

(London, 1996); Gray, Persian painting, pp. 109 25.

104 Jeremy Johns, 'The rise of Middle Islamic hand made geometrically painted ware in
Bilad al Sham (nth 13th centuries AD)', in Roland Pierre Gayraud (ed.), CoUoque
international d'archeohgie islamique (Cairo, 1988), pp. 65 8, 88 9.

739

The New Cambridge History of Islam

25.20 Harun al Rashid in the bathhouse from the Khamsa of Nizami painted by Bihzad
(899/1494), Or. 6810, fol. 27V. By permission of the British Library.

We possess very little information concerning the makers of this type of
pottery between the fifth/ eleventh and twelfth/ eighteenth centuries, though
it is perhaps significant that in most of the available anthropological studies
from the Middle East and North Africa handmade pottery is made by village

740

Islamic art and architecture

25.21 Handmade slip painted ceramic jar (seventh eighth /thirteenth fourteenth century),
Amman Citadel Museum, Jordan. Photo: Marcus Milwright.

women for use in the home. The complete and fragmentary vessels from Jordan dating from the sixth eighth /twelfth fourteenth centuries often carry
complex patterns painted onto the surface with coloured slip clays (pi. 25.21).
These attractive designs appear to be very localised in character, and it has
been suggested that the dense, geometric patterns may be related to the motifs
on basketry, weaving and embroidery. The archaeological evidence indicates
that, unlike urban pottery production, vessel forms and decorative modes evolved very slowly in villages. Our evidence from archaeological research is
more fragmentary in other parts of the Islamic world, but it is evident that
similar processes of hand forming pottery were employed in rural areas ranging from Central Asia to the Persian Gulf, North Africa and sub Saharan
Africa.

The New Cambridge History of Islam

Perhaps the most famous art forms associated with the nomadic popula tions of the Islamic world are carpets, felts, and woven and embroidered textiles. The flocks of sheep and goats tended by nomads provided the wool
needed for these items, while the caustic agents and dyes could be gathered
from plant and mineral sources. Woollen textiles may perform a wide range of
functions, including clothing, tent fabrics, floor coverings, storage bags and

saddle cloths. Numerous traditions of nomadic textile work can be identified
around the Islamic world, though some of the most sophisticated are found in
Turkey, Iran and Central Asia. For instance, the Qashqa'i tribal confederation
in the Persian province of Fars produces a wide range of patterned textiles. 105
The traditional loom (charkh) which can be used for the manufacture of woven textiles, tapestry rugs (sing, gilim or kilim) and knotted pile carpets is
horizontal and held in place with wooden pegs driven directly into the ground.
Other equipment includes the heddle rods (for alternating the warp threads
when weaving) attached onto a triangular wooden frame and, for making knotted pile carpets, a metal carpet comb (ahanja) and pair of scissors. Carpet
making is often a communal activity among the women. Like other tribal carpet traditions in the Islamic world, the designs found on Qashqa'i carpets
are subject to considerable variation. Common features are a polychromatic
palette of reds, blues, greens and yellows and a composition based round large
lozenges enclosed within a series of rectangular bands of repeated ornament.
The vocabulary of motifs is extensive, comprising simple geometric shapes,
stylised plant forms, birds, fish and other animals. This vibrant visual tradition
is one of many still to be found in the rural areas of the Islamic world.

105 Hans Wulff, The traditional crafts of Persia: Their development, technology and influence on
Eastern and Western civilizations (Cambridge, MA, 1966), pp. 212 17; Whitworth Art
Gallery, Tfie Qashqa'i of Iran (Manchester, 1976).

742

Music

AMNON SHILOAH

From instinctive chanting to sophisticated singing

Reflecting on the question of the origin of music, al Farabi argues in his Kitab
al musiqi al kabir (The great book of music) that, like other animals, man is
instinctively motivated to express a range of emotions via sound. From this
initial phase, through observation and experience, man attained a sophisti
cated vocal art. This discovery led to the gradual development of musical
instruments with which he enhanced the art of singing. The musical theorist
appears in the final stage of development, which coincides with the achieve
ments in the realm of Islamic civilisation. 1

Four hundred years later Ibn Khaldun (d. 808/1406), in his Muqaddima
(Prolegomenon), describes another progressive development, from the pri
mary, simple tunes of pre Islamic society to the sophisticated forms of music
created in the prosperous urban centres of Muslim society in its golden age.
He also argues that unlike the forms of folk music and the cantillation of
sacred texts, which are grasped by nature without instruction, professional
musicians in urban centres base their art on codified norms. 2.

The systematic crystallisation of such a newly sophisticated art after the
advent of Islam may be described as the forging of a great musical tradition,
which provided a vehicle and a standard for those who shared it to identify
with others in a common civilisation. It refers to the skilful fusion of selected
elements from the previous great traditions of conquered peoples with
elements from the homogenous Arab 'little tradition'. This synthesis,

achieved in a spirit of compromise, resulted in successful 'new arrangements'
so conceived as to appear to both conquerors and conquered as an outgrowth
of the old. Indeed, scattered evidence shows the borrowing of elements from

1 R. D. Erlanger (trans.), La musique arabe, 6 vols. (Paris 1930 9), vol. I, pp. 18 19.
2. Ibn Khaldun, The Muqaddimah of Ibn Khaldun: An introduction to history, trans.
F. Rosenthal, 3 vols. (London, 1958; repr. Princeton, 1967), vol. II, pp. 399 402.

743

The New Cambridge History of Islam

conquered cultures which were grafted upon an Arabic tradition that had a
character of its own. Arabisation, whose most prominent manifestations are
the quest for and use of linguistic purity, was considered as a general unifying
factor, including the musical domain. 3

Following the subsequent decentralisation, one witnesses the rise of local styles, particularly in Iran, Central Asia and the Ottoman empire. Nevertheless, they continued to draw upon structural and aesthetic elements of the great tradition.

In dealing with the development of this art, the observer is hampered by the total lack of musical documents, and must therefore fall back on the abundant surviving literature about music. However, some extant rudimentary nota tional systems deserve mention. They include al Kindi's exercise in two parts for lutenists using the 'solfegio' system, referring to the name of the strings

and the fingers used to shorten them; 4 the use by many theorists of an
alphabetical notation to indicate the pitches of scales; and al Dhahabf s
(eighth/fourteenth century) notational system using an eight lined stave
in
different colours. 5 Yet all were used only for pedagogical purposes.

Religion and music

The long debate on the permissibility of music emerged during the first
centuries of Islam. At first the protagonists founded their arguments on
scattered verses of the Qur'an, hardly touching upon music as such.
Later
the theologians and juridical disputants were led to base their
argumentation
on the hadlth and the interpretations of the leaders of the schools of law.
Their
method of reasoning by analogy often led the antagonists to draw
opposite,
and arbitrary, conclusions from the same tradition.

In the first full scale treatise based on the hadlth, Ibn Abi '1 Dunya (d.
281/
894), used the term malahl in a broad sense implying all kinds of
amusements,
forbidden pleasure and moral misbehaviour, from which music and its
prac
tice were considered inseparable. While malahl continued to signify
musical
instruments in particular, the prominent term used in the writings on the

3 A. Shiloah, Music in the world of Islam (Aldershot and Detroit, 1995;
repr. 2000), pp. 19 22.

4 A. Shiloah (ed. and trans.), The dimension of music in Islamic and
Jewish culture, Variorum
Collected Studies Series CS393 (London, 1993), section 1, pp. 203 5 and
facsimile of the
Manisa MS 1705.

5 A. Shiloah and A. Berthier, A propos d'un petit livre arabe sur la
musique', Revue de
Musicologie, 71 (1986).

6 J. Robson (ed. and trans.), Tracts on listening to music: Being Dhamm
al malahl by Ibn Abi
'I Dunya and Bawariq al ilma' by Majd al Din al Tusi al Ghazdli (London,
1938).

Music

lawfulness of music is sama\ It literally means listening, and, by extension, the
music listened to. The concept of sama 1 is usually contrasted with ghina 1
(cantus) which designates secular music. The theologians and religious author
ities regarded the latter's influence as a depraving and debasing agent. Many
authors ascribe its origin and effects to Satan's evil forces, or they transfer the
biblical invention of music from Jubal to his father Lamek, emphasising his
affiliation to the legacy of the sinful Cain. They were also concerned with
respect for the holy texts and their appropriate rendition; formally composed
melodies were considered distractions preventing the faithful from concen
trating on the message of the text.

The mystical movement developed a different approach to music. The
earliest Sufis' simple piety and gospel of love were gradually transformed into
an elaborate mystical doctrine, in which music and dance occupied a prom
inent role. The mystics developed complex congregational rituals and spiritual
exercises designed to create religious ecstasy (wajd) in the participants and to
realise a union with the Godhead. The most remarkable ritual was the dhikr
(lit. 'remembrance'), which referred to the Qur'anic injunction 'to remember
God as often as possible'. The Sufis' dhikr usually included singing, and
occasionally dancing, which were considered a manifestation of their infinite,

ecstatic love of God. The most spectacular and sophisticated music and dance
associated with mystical practices are those of the Mevlevls' L ayn sharif (hymns
composed specifically to lead worshippers to a state of union with God).

Literary writings on music

The encyclopaedic and literary works are primarily conceived along the lines
of the adab literature. Thus one finds discussions in works by al Jahiz (d. 255/
869) on the characteristics of sounds, the class of singing girls (qaynat), rules
of performance established by the Sasanians, classification of professional
musicians etc. The grammarian Mufaddal ibn Salama (d. c. 290/903) and the
geographer Ibn Khurradadhbih (d. 300/911) both wrote books on the malahi
(as musical instruments), including a great variety of topics: the origin and
virtues of music, sayings of Greek philosophers concerning the benefit of
music, the Persian modal system etc. The historian al Mas'udi (d. 345/956)
reports, in his Muruj al dhahab, two extensive orations by specialists on music
and dance.

This type of writing culminated in the monumental work Kitab al agharii
(Book of songs) of Abu al Faraj al Isfahan! (d. 356/967). It contains a collection
of poems set to music from the pre Islamic period to the third/ninth century.

745

He indicated the origin and melodic and rhythmic mode of each song. In
addition to biographical details about more than ninety famous male and

female singers, instrumentalists and writers on music, the work includes a
mine of information on the history of music, musical life and musical aesthetics.

The science of music and the Greek legacy

In the framework of the ideal of learning during the golden age of Muslim
civilisation the study of music acquired a prominent place among the areas of
knowledge, and committed itself to a systematic definition of its scope and
object, while establishing appropriate methods for the analysis of its various
norms. This development reached its culmination with the translation into
Arabic of Greek treatises on music in the framework of the Bayt al Hikma.
In his Kitab alfihrist (Index [to Arabic books]), Abu '1 Faraj ibn al Nadlm
(d. 385/995) lists thirty three titles of such translated treatises. 7

Thenceforth Hhn al musiqi (the science of music) became part of the
branches of learning often opposed to the Arabic ghina\ usually applied to
the practice of sophisticated music.

In writings of this type familiar Greek topics and ideas are repeated, refined,
improved, expanded or conceived in a new light. This concerns the broad
philosophical metaphoric approach, analyses of music in terms of numbers,
the definition of the different melodic and rhythmical parameters, the moral
and therapeutic effects of music and the linking of cosmological and astral
phenomena.

The philosophical-metaphoric approach

Abu Yusuf Ya'qub ibn Ishaq al Kind! (d. 260/870) is the first author in the field
of the science of music whose achievements are known to us. He is said to
have composed thirteen treatises on the art and science of music, of which

only six have come down to us. Most of his writings on music are centred on
the doctrine of ethos, the Pythagorean speculations concerning the relation
ship of music with the universal scheme of things, of human life, character and
emotions. The guiding idea behind this approach is that the primary aim of a
philosopher studying music should be the necessary link to broad theoretical
knowledge. Al Kind! refers to the Persian and Byzantine modes and to the

7 H. G. Farmer, 'Greek theorists of music in Arabic translation', his (1929 30).

746

Music

eight rhythmical modes of the Arabs. He also made the first attempt at notation.

The fourth epistle in the Ikhwan al Safa''s encyclopaedia, the Rasa'il, is devoted to music. In its range, purpose, and the interweaving of metaphoric
ideas and practical subjects, this treatise is unique in Arabic musical literature.

According to their theory the wonders of creation, the phenomena of nature and matters within the domain of human creation are all subordinate
to the ideal laws of music and harmony, of which the music made by man is
only a pale reflection. Since the harmony is expounded by means of numbers,
the epistle is full of arithmetical speculations that expand into many and varied
domains such as calligraphy, language, poetic metre, human corporeal struc

ture, the system of stars etc. It also claims that music is a force exerting ethical
and therapeutic influence on humanity and a factor in establishing the spiritual, physical and philosophical equilibrium of man.

Among the practical issues the Ikhwan deal with are the sciences of sounds,
of rhythm and prosody and of instruments. Of particular interest is the chapter
on the science of sounds, which exemplifies everything written up to that period. It provides a systematic classification of all the sounds that exist in
nature and mankind.

The speculative trend

The treatment of Arabic music as a subject of significant intellectual value per
se began with Thabit ibn Qurra (d. 288/901), a Sabian astrologer, mathema
tician and translator from Greek and Syriac into Arabic. He wrote treatises on
music in Arabic and an extensive, important one in Syriac. All are lost except
Mas^ala fi'l muslqi (The problem of music) in Arabic. This work deals with a
question concerning occasional singing in octaves as well as the appropriate
accompaniment of a vocal piece. A similar problem occurs in Pseudo Aristotle's Problemata.

Al Farabl (d. c. 339/950), known in Europe as Alpharabius, has written several treatises on music. His Ihsa' al 'ulum (Enumeration[/ Classification] of
the sciences), in which he enumerates all the known sciences, including music,
was accorded the highest respect by Arab, Christian and Jewish medieval authors, as proved by its various translations into Latin and Hebrew. The chapter on music provides a definition of the science of music, its principles,
methodology, musical parameters and instruments, rules of rhythm and

Shiloah (ed. and trans.), The dimension, section 3.

The New Cambridge History of Islam

composition. Besides two treatises on the science of rhythms, his major and
foremost among Arabic treatises on music is Kitab al muslql al kabir. In this
work al Farabi considers musical theory as the supreme intellectual enterprise
contributing to the body of human knowledge. It is true that as a trained
musical performer he based much of his study on the living music of his time,
but he emphasised, in the spirit of Greek and Latin theorists, that the perfect
theorist should reason on the basis of his knowledge of all the rudiments of his
art, and be able to deduce the principles governing musical science. 9

Ibn Srna (d. 428/1037), known in Europe as Avicenna, followed the ency
clopaedic conception of the sciences in uniting philosophy with the study of
nature and in seeing man's perfection as lying in both knowledge and action.
He refers to music in his monumental Qanunfi'l tibb (Canon on medicine) in
dealing with the pulse, arguing that a well ordered pulse is comparable to the
most perfect consonances: the octave, fifth and fourth.

Ibn Sina's most comprehensive discussion on the science of music appears
in chapter twelve of the third part of his major work, Kitab al shift? (The book
of healing). 10 In the introduction to this chapter he describes sound as a
physiological sensation, as a device of communication from a distance among
humans and animals, and as a means of communication between men and
animals. However, he adds that meaningful sound used in the animal and
human kingdoms does not achieve musical sense unless it has defined pitch

and duration. Noteworthy are the passage on ornaments and embellishment
as used both in melody and rhythm, and the chapters dealing with genres and
systems that foreshadow the systematic modal presentation of Safi al Din.

The Andalusian and Maghribi tradition

After the Arab conquest (92/711) the Iberian Peninsula became the scene of
one of the most fascinating examples of intercultural contacts; members of a
highly diversified society took part in crystallising a social and cultural sym
biosis, wherein music occupied a prominent place.

Al Maqqari, in his Nafh al tlb (Breath of perfumes), depicted the Baghdad!
musician Ziryab, who became the chief minstrel at the Cordoban court, as a
cultural hero and the innovator of Andalusian music in toto. However, a
manuscript of the Tunisian Ahmad al Tifashi (d. 651/1253), discovered in the
1950s, offers us a new outlook on the development of this style. He describes it

9 Erlanger, La musique arabe, vols. I and II.
10 Ibid., vol. II.

Music

as a dynamic process supported by several renowned figures, the most
prominent of whom was the philosopher Ibn Bajja (d. 533/1139). Al Tifashi
writes about him: 'After having secluded himself for a few years to work with

skilled singing girl slaves he improved musical forms by mixing the songs of
the Christians and those of the East.' 11 At all events, the most remarkable local
innovation is related to the new poetic genres: the muwashshah in classical
Arabic and the zajal in the vernacular. The intimate association of these
strophic genres with music gave them considerable popularity, and they
became instrumental in the development of another important innovation
concerning the sophisticated compound form: the nuba. 12

It is assumed that musicians among the Hispano Arab exiles brought the art
of the nuba with them, and cultivated it in the major North African centres.
Old styles are still extant in Fez, Tlemcen, Algiers and Tunis. Their nuba
repertories are called respectively ala, gharnati, sarCa and ma'luf. Some differ
ences notwithstanding, they are very similar in spirit and structure. There are
numerous anthologies containing poems arranged according to the nuba to
which they belong and according to its characteristic parts, along with added
indications pertaining to the musical components. One also finds an obvious
interpenetration of the art of the nuba and prominent religious forms, namely
the mystic rituals. 13

A change in musical theory

Safi al Din al Urmawi (d. 693/1294), who, after the fall of Baghdad (656/1258),
became the official musician of the Mongol conquerors, is the first great
theorist to base his entire work on his observations and experience as a
performing musician. In his two major treatises, Kitab al adwar (The book
of cycles[/ modes]) and the Risala alsharafiyya fi'lnisab alta'Ufiyya (The
Sharafian treatise on musical proportions), 14 he achieved a systematisation of
the general scale and the whole modal system. He based his theory mainly on
the music in vogue, while at the same time taking advantage of earlier

11 See A. Shiloah, The theory of music in Arabic writings (ca goo to 1900), RISM Bx, vol. II
(Munich, 2003), pp. 184 6.

12 O. Wright, 'Music in Muslim Spain', in Salma Khadra Jayyusi (ed.), Tfte legacy of Muslim
Spain (Leiden, 1992).

13 C. Poche, La musique arabo andalouse (Paris, 1995).

14 Erlanger, La musique arabe, vol. Ill; Safi al Din al Urmawi, Kitab al adwar, ed.
E. Neubauer, facsimile of MS 3449, Topkapi, Istanbul; Safi al Din al Urmawi, al
Risala al sharafiyya, ed. E. Neubauer, facsimile of MS 3460, Topkapi, Istanbul, Series
C, vol. XXVI, (Frankfurt am Main, 1984).

theoretical achievements. Thus he became an ideal junction of the Persian
modal tradition and all the other elements incorporated in the framework of
the art of music in Muslim civilisation. His works became the model for
subsequent generations throughout the whole Middle Eastern region and
Central Asia. However, the majority of treatises written after him differed
from their model by singling out local particularities and stylistic features that
reflect the practice of each author's milieu.

Abd al Qadir al Maraghi ibn Ghaybi (d. 839/1435) was a famous Iranian
theorist and a distinguished lute player, poet and painter. He was Tirnur's
chief minstrel in Samarqand, and served as a musician in other courts. He
wrote several works, some of which are in Persian; they are of the highest

importance because of the information they contain about the practical art of
music. He is usually placed with Safi al Din in the front rank of the theorists.

Shortly after Safi al Din's death a new theoretical trend seems to have emerged in the Ottoman empire and the Near East. Evidence that such a trend came into being is indicated in the encyclopaedia of Ibn al Akfani (d. 749/1348), Irshad al qdsid (The guiding seeker), by the popular and didactic
versified treatise the Risala fi'l miisiqi of Shams al Din al Saydawi al Dhahabi
(fourteenth century), which includes an important system of notation, and
in the work of the distinguished Ottoman theorist Muhammad al Ladhiqi (d. 901/1495). The last was a favourite of the sultan Bayazld II (r. 886 918/
1481 1512), to whom he dedicated his major work, the Risala al fathiyya fi'l
musiql (The epistle of victory), probably a kind of homage commemorating
the sultan's victory. 15

Musical instruments are described in a variety of ways. Sometimes they are
simply listed with minimal information, while at others they are treated in a
systematic, classificatory manner.

The sources mention a bewildering array of instruments, designated by names and specific characteristics. They number 138, featuring drums, aero
phones and chordophones. Many of those instruments have fallen into disuse.
The list includes a few Greek and Byzantine instruments: urghan (organ), artnuniki (panpipes), salbak (sambyke or sambuka); lux (lyre), kithara, the Persian
jank (harp) and the Chinese mushtak (mouth organ).

One should add to this list the Greek and original treatises devoted to pneumatic and hydraulic apparatuses and organs. 1

15 Erlanger, La musique arabe, vol. IV.

16 H. G. Farmer, Studies in oriental musical instruments (first series London 1931; second
series Glasgow, 1939).

27

Cookery

DAVID WAINES

Introduction: the inheritors

The fourth/tenth century traveller and geographer al Muqaddasi (d. c. 390/
1000) observed laconically that the inhabitants of central Arabia were both
'frugal and emaciated, so little nourished are they by food'. 1 In the account of
his travels through nineteenth century Arabia Deserta, Doughty noted that
the Arab can live for long months so slenderly nourished that it seems to us
they endure without food'. 2 While one cautions against assuming that con
ditions remained static over the intervening millennium, both comments
strikingly reflect a mood found in Muslim 'recollections' of their early com
munity. This introduction, impressionistic as it must be, attempts to capture
basic features of the Arab food culture before the rise to prominence of the
major urban centres of the emerging Islamic tradition in the provinces of Iraq,
Syria, Egypt, Persia and beyond.

First, central Arabia in the Prophet's lifetime experienced a relative scarcity
of food resources, and hence its fellow traveller, hunger. The Prophet
Muhammad was once asked, 'We live in a land where we are afflicted by

hunger, so when may we eat animals which have died a natural death?' 3 The

tradition (hadith) is making a legal point concerning meat not ritually slaugh

tered. Implicitly it also touches on a familiar problem of scarcity and necessity.

The Prophet answered, As long as you have neither a morning or evening drink [presumably milk] or gather vegetables you may eat them.' The sit uation is alluded to in the Qur'an (5:3), where the term for severe hunger is

1 Muhammad ibn Ahmad al Muqaddasi, Deseriptio imperii moslemici, ed. M. J. de Goeje
(Leiden, 1906), p. 254.

2 C. M. Doughty, Travels in Arabia Deserta, 2 vols. (London, 1964), vol. I, p. 446.

3 All the hadith citations are taken from Muhammad ibn Abd Allah al Khatib al Tabriz!,
Mishkat al masabih, trans. James Robson, 2 vols. (Lahore, 1990), vol. II, pp. 886 911.

makhmasa, and it echoes the expression 'a day of hunger /famine' (90:14, fi

yawm dhl masghaba). Other hadlths point to the same underlying reality. The

Prophet's wife 'A'isha is reported as saying that 'sometimes a month would

come in which they did not kindle a fire [for cooking] having only dates and

water', the two so called 'black things'. Scarcity made a virtue of moderation,

in eating as in the goal of the moral life. 'Two people's food is enough for

three' is repeated in hadxth sources. Nonetheless, as Doughty stressed, for the
Bedouin 'it is seldom in their lives they must make a shift to endure with a
squalid diet of locusts' 4 a sober reminder that in times of food crises the poor
may just cope better than the more comfortably off.

Following from this was the absence of a 'differentiated cuisine' in the
Prophet's Arabia. Town, village or oasis and desert dwellers alike lived on a
margin, albeit flexible, where hunger if seldom abject malnutrition was
never a distant memory. In various hadlths Muhammad, himself a town
dweller, is said to have rarely or never seen white bread in his lifetime. It is
reported, too, that the Prophet never saw a sieve. When asked how unsifted
barley (a lesser grain, despised in Europe at the same period) could be eaten he
replied that 'they ground it and blew it and when some of it had blown away
they moistened and ate what was left'. Doubtless this was a type of gruel that
Doughty had frequently tasted, declaring that 'the Arab housewives can
make savoury messes of any grain, seething it and putting thereto only a little
salt and samn'. 5 Salt, a key ingredient of the pot, was called by the Prophet's
contemporary Isidore of Seville 'as useful as the sun' and labelled by
Muhammad himself as 'the Lord of condiments'.

Simple fare required simple cooking methods. A pot for boiling grain based
gruel sufficed also for steeping vegetables or occasional portions of meat. After
water skins, a pair of millstones would be the most essential implement in a
town or village household. For preparing their own grain nomads borrowed
the stones owned by their tribal leaders. Grinding everywhere was women's
work. In settled areas the hearth fire served to heat the pot as well as a round,
shield like iron pan called tannur (also known as saf) upon which flat bread was
baked. Desert dwellers dug a fire pit filled with whatever tinder was at hand
and baked barley cakes under the ashes (called malla) or roasted small desert

fauna in their skins. Meat, cut into strips, was sun dried and kept for future
consumption, generally in stews.

4 Doughty, Arabia Deserta, vol. I, p. 520.
5 Ibid., vol. II, p. 220.

752

Cookery

The inheritance

With the rise and expansion of Muslim rule beyond the confines of the Hijaz
from the first/ seventh through the fourth/ tenth centuries came the inheri
tance of the food cultures of the conquered lands. Here Muslims encountered
in abundance the famous triad of the classical world: wheat, the grape and the
olive. This contrasted with the basic dual source of Arab nourishment, the
date palm and the camel. Muhammad's fondness for dates is clear from hadiths
on food. c A'isha reported him as saying that 'a family which has dates will not
be hungry'. He also remarked that no food or drink satisfies like milk. The
importance of the date palm is signalled in the Qur'an and, in a hadlih, it is
called the most blessed of trees. Milk (labari) is one of God's earthly bounties
(Q 16:66) and forms one of the heavenly rivers 'forever fresh' (Q 47:15). Both
dates and milk were eaten fresh or sun dried and stored until required. In the
medieval lexicon, marisa referred to a preparation of dates, macerated by hand

and mixed in milk (or water).

Also in contrast to the classical distinction between cultivated and unculti
vated lands, the Arab drew sustenance from both. In his study of early Islamic
dietary law Michael Cook describes both liberal and restrictive tendencies in
the law. 6 The more inclusive and permissive trend was notable in the Hijaz
centres of Mecca and Medina where the Malik! legal school originated. Iraq
was the home of the restrictive tendency, particularly among the scholars of
Kufa. Islamic law developed and was consolidated chiefly outside the Hijaz, in
regions within the historical ambit of richly cultivated spaces, urban trade and
political power. The camel was, unsurprisingly, accepted by all Muslim legal
schools (but rejected in Jewish law) as emblematic of the Arab culture from
which Islam emerged. In broader terms of contrasting food cultures, Iraqi or
Egyptian legal scholars were less pressed with a nagging reality of scarcity and
hunger than were their Hijazi counterparts. Scholars of the Hijaz lived on in a
milieu where the lizard and the hare were unequivocally accepted as food
while being rejected elsewhere. Traditions attributed to the Prophet concern
ing the consumption of birds and beasts of prey may reflect this broad
distinction: of all the legal schools, both Sunrii and Shi'ite, only Malikis
permitted the eating of birds while merely disapproving beasts of prey.
They were prohibited by all other scholars. Finally, it is perhaps owing to a
lingering memory of famine that both Muslim and Jewish legal traditions
permitted as edible that most dreaded famine food of all, the locust.

6 Michael Cook, 'Early Islamic dietary law', JSAI, 7 (1986).

The New Cambridge History of Islam

The formation of new cultural frontiers is a process involving multiple
contributors and commodities. Describing the process, like all historical
enquiry, is subject to the nature of the sources available. In his Fihrist, Ibn
al Nadim (d. 380/990) notes that in Abbasid Iraq, during the first half of the
third/ninth century, there appeared an informal group of gastronomes asso
dated with court circles. To each person, whether poet, musician, astrologer,
physician or indeed member of the ruling caliphal family, Ibn al Nadim attrib
uted a cookbook. 7 These are no longer extant. Traces of them survive, along
with recipes from other collections, in the first surviving culinary manual in
Arabic compiled by one Ibn Sayyar al Warraq, probably a contemporary of
Ibn al Nadim. Ibn Sayyar' s Kitab al tabikh provides clues required for piecing
together the component elements of a 'new' haute cuisine, now cast in its
Arabic /Muslim fashion characterised by cosmopolitanism, complexity of
preparation of dishes and the use of costly ingredients.

Briefly stated, the main strands are, first, Sasanian Persian, the names of
dishes, such as sikbaj and zirbaj, and of numerous ingredients such as isfanakh
(spinach) indicating their Persian origin. Ibn al Sayyar preserves a story of how
sikbaj came to be created by the cooks in the court of Khusrau Anushirwan.
The small triangle shaped meat filled pastry called sanbusak, known in India as
samosa, is also Persian. Second, the Arab tradition is represented by dishes
modified to meet the tastes of the new urban leisured class. A traditional Arab
preparation, such as tharid, was compared by the Prophet to his wife 'A'isha,
the most excellent of women; another dish, madira, was said to be a favourite
of Mu'awiya, founder of the Umayyad dynasty. Both these preparations in the
Prophet's time were simple and unpretentious. Tharid, for example, was
prepared by breaking up bread with the hands and moistening it in broth,
often with some meat added; it could also be made with crumbled bread,

broth, marrow and eggs. The recipes for tharid in the Kitab al tabikh, however,
are far more elaborate and costly. One contains both meat and poultry cooked
in a pot with truffles, caramelised honey, chick peas, leeks and rue, and
seasoned with salt, pepper, cumin, caraway and coriander; then fine baked
bread was broken, moistened with the stock and the contents of the pot
poured on top. Third, regional dishes, often of indeterminate origin, are
found. Yet another dish bearing a Persian name, isfidhbaja, is associated
with the region of Sughd (Sogdia), while a version of tharid is called
Syrian.

7 Ibn al Nadim, The Fihrist of al Nadim: A tenth century survey of Muslim culture, ed. and
trans. Bayard Dodge, 2 vols. (New York, 1970), vol. II, p. 742.

8 Ibn Sayyar al Warraq, Kitab al tabikh, ed. K. Ohrnberg and S. Mroueh (Helsinki, 1987).

Cookery

Fourth, new plants from India were incorporated into many tempting dishes.
The eggplant, badhinjan, recently introduced to the Middle East from
India (Sanskrit vatingana), was a favourite of the most famous of the
early gourmands, the erstwhile caliph Ibrahim ibn al Mahdl (d. 224/839),
whose cookbook contained several recipes for dishes using the vegetable.
Finally, the Hellenistic medical /dietetic tradition is reflected in several
chapters in the Kitab al tabikh on a wide variety of foodstuffs, describing
their 'natures' in terms of the Galenic humoral system: lettuce, for example,
is 'cold, calming the flame of a hot stomach, cutting sexual desire and inducing
sleep'. 9

It is probable, although more research will be required, that the Arabs'

culinary inheritance may ultimately be traced further back than the Sasanians.

The French scholar Jean Bottero has examined Babylonian cuneiform texts
dating from the seventeenth century BCE containing, he claims, the 'most
ancient recipes of all'. Some of the recipes relate in precise detail a dish's
preparation, with the aim, says Bottero, 'of creating a plate with a taste
intelligently achieved and a presentation both recherche and nutritionally
rich'. 10 This closely fits the style and purpose of the vast majority of recipes
both in Ibn Sayyar al Warraq and in the handful of later culinary manuals of
the Arabic corpus.

In these later manuals 11 evidence of other culinary legacies is also found. In
a cookbook of Maghrib! provenance there are Berber preparations for cous
cous, an Andalusi manual contains recipes for chicken dishes made in the
Jewish community, and another manual's Egyptian provenance is suggested
in part by the inclusion of dishes employing species of Nile fish, and also by
recipes using mallow leaves (mulukhiyya). Collectively, the compilers of the
Arabic cookbooks had captured, by selection and organisation, portions of
manifold Middle Eastern cooking traditions, both high and low, which hith
erto had been orally transmitted over the generations. The significance of the
corpus is that it represents historically the earliest recorded, extensive culinary

9 Ibid., p. 39.

10 Jean Bottero, 'The most ancient recipes of all', in J. Wilkins, D. Harvey and M. Dobson
(eds.), Food in Antiquity (Exeter, 1996), p. 253.

11 The contents of these manuals will be treated collectively to save space in the discussion.
See chapter bibliography for full details. They are: al Warraq, Kitab al tabikh, fourth/
tenth century; al Baghdad!, Kitab al tabikh, written in 622/1226; Ibn Razin al Tujibi, Fad

alat al khiwan, written around 640/1266; Ibn al 'Adlm, al Wusla ila 1 hablb, seventh/
thirteenth century; Anonymous, La cocina hispano magrebi, seventh/thirteenth century;
Anonymous, Kanz alfawa'id, compiled c. eighth/fourteenth century.

tradition of any pre modern civilisation, including that of the southern Sung
Chinese (1127 1279). I2

The classical Arabic /Islamic culinary heritage, 184-803 / 800-1400

Luxury may be said to be an activity or commodity that is expensive, pleasurable and unnecessary. Luxury foods are no exception. 13 The historian
al Mas'udi (d. 345/956) provides an example from the reign of the Abbasid
caliph Harun al Rashid (d. 194/809). Invited to dinner by his half brother, Ibrahim ibn al Mahdi, the caliph was presented with a dish in the shape of a fish
made from hundreds of fish tongues. It was said to have cost 1,000 dirhams.
Even the caliph deemed this extravagant, and ordered an equivalent amount
of money distributed to the poor in expiation. Overall, the recipes in the Arabic corpus do not reflect such a degree of luxury. This, despite Ibn Sayyar
al Warraq's introductory remark that he had gathered together for his anon
ymous patron dishes from the tables of kings, caliphs, notables and chiefs.
In general the dishes contained in the culinary manuals were intended for
a comfortable urban class of bureaucrats, scholars, merchants and military
personnel. Another anecdote from al Mas'udi is instructive. The caliph

al Mutawakkil (d. 247/861) was relaxing one day with his courtiers and singers
beside one of the canals traversing Baghdad. The aroma of cooking being
prepared by a sailor on his boat drifted towards the group. The caliph ordered
the pot brought to him. It was a sweet and sour beef stew of sikbaj, which the
party completely devoured. The caliph paid 2,000 dirhams for the pleasure,
saying it was the best sikbaj he had ever tasted. The luxury element in the
story, if authentic, is the amount the caliph was prepared to reward the cook.
Recalling the story, also if authentic, that sikbaj was the creation of the court of
the Sasanian ruler Khusrau Anushlrwan, by early c Abbasid times the dish's
popularity had 'trickled down' to the lower social strata in undoubtedly a
different, affordable preparation. The key characteristic of the dish was a
sweet sour taste created by cooking meat in a stock containing vinegar and
honey/ sugar. This example illustrates the reverse process, already mentioned,
of simple, traditional Arab fare transformed by more and costly ingredients.
Knowledge of matters culinary and dietetic was available through both oral

12 Michael Freeman, 'Sung', in K. C. Chang (ed.), Food in Chinese culture (New Haven,
1977), p- 144-

13 See David Waines, '"Luxury foods" in medieval Islamic societies', in Marijke van der
Veen (ed.), World Archaeology: Luxury Foods, 34, 3 (2003), special issue.

Cookery

and written channels. Written works included two encyclopaedias, each of
which contained sections on food and drink: one by Ibn Qutayba (d. 276/889),
the other by Ibn 'Abd Rabbih (d. 329/940). During this same period (257 308/
870 920) the standard collections of hadlth (traditions) of the Prophet
Muhammad were compiled, in which food and drink were also treated. The
earliest Arabic work on agronomy, written in the early fourth/tenth century
and attributed to one Ibn Wahshiyya, contains information on the culinary
and medical uses of the many plants covered in it.

The kitchen

Food preparation took place in areas ranging from greater to lesser special
isation, depending upon their social location. In palaces there were separate
public and private kitchens, and the cookhouses (matabikh) were separate
from the bakeries (makhabiz). In modest urban and rural homes the cooking
area shared the space in which other domestic functions such as sleeping or
eating took place. In prosperous urban households the kitchen occupied its
own special space with or without ancillary areas for storage, a latrine or
cook's room. The following discussion will focus on this last example as the
one best reflected in the extant cookbooks.

Complex food preparation called for a full batterie de cuisine. One of the
major appliances in the kitchen was the oven or tannur, not to be confused
with the round, shield shaped instrument mentioned above. The oven
resembled a large earthenware beehive or inverted pot. Charcoal or other
fuel was inserted through a low side opening and ignited. Baking could begin
when the fuel had burned down to ashes and the oven was sufficiently hot. To
some extent, temperature could be controlled by adjusting the lower aper
ture, or a larger one in the top. Bread was baked by slapping the fiat rolled
dough on the curved inner surface near the top opening, and leaving it for a

few moments until cooked. Nearly a dozen implements are known to have
been used in bread making, from a dough board and rolling pins to a poker
used to extract a loaf that had fallen onto the ashes. A clear distinction between
social classes was in bread consumption. The well to do had access to the
finest wheat flour, while the daily loaf of the poor was made of inferior quality
wheat or barley; in times of hardship 'secondary grains' such as pulses, acorns
or chestnuts had to suffice. 14

The tannur was used also for baking other dishes. A kind of chicken pie
prepared in a pan was lowered into the oven to bake; sometimes oven dishes

14 See David Waines, 'Cereals, bread and society', JESHO, 30 (1980).

(called tannuriyya) were left to stew overnight in a slowly cooling oven and
served the following day. In another recipe, the prepared carcass of a whole
animal was placed on a spit and inserted through the top of the oven with a
pan placed at the bottom to catch the dripping fat. Of Mesopotamian origin
(Akaddian tinuru), the tanniir probably made its way westwards under Muslim
rule, examples having been uncovered by archaeologists in the Iberian Peninsula. 15

Another contrivance, less frequently mentioned in the sources, was the
mustawqid, or 'fireplace'. This was constructed along a wall to about half a
person's height and provided with vents for air intake and the expulsion of

smoke. It was designed chiefly to accommodate several pans/pots side by side
at a time. The smaller kanun was a brazier like metal appliance, moveable or
stationary, which supported a pot over the heat; the term al nar, common in
the North African and AndalusI cookbooks, was probably short for kanun al nar.

The communal oven (furn) was used for baking its owner's bread for sale or
the dough for those households who prepared it in their own kitchens. The
furn was further employed in cooking dishes initially prepared in the domestic
kitchen and then returned to be garnished and served in the home. It could
also be used for festive occasions when a household might require additional
cooking space and labour.

The range of implements and utensils, containers and vessels mentioned in
the culinary sources suggest a prosperous household's degree of self
sufficiency and independence from commercial cooked food establishments
described in the market inspectors' handbooks (hisba). Ibn al Ukhuwwa
(d. 729/1329) lists a number of these: the sellers of roast meat, liver prepara
tions and relishes, sausage makers, butchers, cooked and pickled meat ven
dors, fish fryers and sweetmeat makers. 1 All these perhaps catered more
specifically to the needs of other sections of the populace. Two reasons may be
adduced for this. First, the culinary manuals contain recipes for home made
versions of most if not all of the commercial market preparations. Second, the
inspectors' manuals convey the impression that market cooked food could be
regarded with some suspicion. Quality was best controlled in the domestic
kitchen itself. Advice and instructions found in certain cookbooks further
indicate a concern for kitchen hygiene. Meat must be thoroughly cleaned of
blood and washed in cold water; a knife used to cut up vegetables should not

15 See Armas Salonen, 'Die Ofen der alten Mesopotamier', Baghdader Mitteilungen, 3 (1964).

16 Ibn al Ukhuwwa, Ma'alim al qurbafi ahkam al hisba, ed. Reuben Levy (London, 1938).

758

Cookery

be used at the same time to cut up meat; old spices which had lost their
essential flavour and become bitter could corrupt the pot. Utensils and pots
should be carefully cleaned by rubbing with brick dust, then with dry pow
dered potash and saffron, and finally with fresh citron leaf. To ensure cleanli
ness, one advice was to change earthenware pots every day, and glazed pots
every five days. Even humoral theory may have informed cooking practices. It
was said that fish should be fried in a metal pan, as both the fish and the pan
were 'cold' while fire and the oil were 'hot' and thus the desired equilibrium
between elemental opposites was achieved in the cooking process.

Food preparation involved labour intensive and time consuming activities
regardless of household size. The culinary manuals yield no data on the
kitchen personnel or who was directly in charge of the supervision and
organisation of the daily routine. It is possible, in the larger households, that
a baker's (khabbaz) initial function evolved into the role of a kitchen steward or
household major domo. The number of persons to be fed on any given day
could vary considerably, from immediate family occupants to meals including
other relations and/ or other dependants and guests.

Food preparation: ingredients and processes

As contemporary recipe collections indicate, meat stews or casseroles repre
sented the single most common type of preparation. Whether goat, mutton or
chicken was used, the animal was slaughtered just prior to cooking, suggesting
that the meat was 'kept fresh' in the courtyard of the house or purchased live
from the market on the day of preparation. The non fowl meat recipes often
only mention the word lahm (meat), which should be assumed to mean
mutton as this was the meat of preference mentioned by physicians in their
accounts of diet. Lamb and kid were also enjoyed. Physicians recommended
kid as suitable for the leisured class because of the meat's natural balance
between the four elements. Similarly beef, only rarely mentioned, was judged
more appropriate for those who toiled and laboured, owing to its natural
coarseness. The cookbooks also contain recipes for game meat such as rabbit
(which might also have been raised 'fresh' in the courtyard), hare, wild cow,
wild ass and gazelle; the horse, mountain goat, oryx and stag were considered
edible as well. One recipe for sikbaj called for beef, mutton and chicken. Fish
dishes were popular as well, fresh rather than salted being the more common,
and generally prepared in a frying pan.

Typically, meat dishes were prepared together with vegetables, or fruit,
milk or cheese and seasonings. At times the preparation was simplicity itself.
'Take chicken breasts, sliced, cut up into small pieces and fry in oil until

cooked. Add pepper, fresh coriander and sprinkle over vinegar and [the condiment] murri over it, then spread ground almonds on top. God willing.' 17
In other recipes, in addition to the characteristic step by step description of the
process, precise quantities of ingredients are provided, even to the spices, the
proper proportion and combination of which usually being left to the cook. A
spice combination in common use throughout the Middle East was cinnamon
and (dried) coriander often combined with cumin with pepper and saffron
widely employed as well. It was this 'spice spectrum' that Europe inherited
from the Middle East from the fourteenth century onward. The essential oils
of cinnamon and pepper were known for their antiseptic, preservative proper
ties, but their use was probably as much a matter of aesthetics as anything,
their preservative function being useful when left over food could be served
the following day with the flavour enhanced. The traditional cooking mediums, the rendered fat of the fat tailed sheep and clarified butter, are mentioned in the cookbooks but so too is the frequently used olive oil, and occasionally sesame oil, while almond and walnut oil appear in some preparations.

Meat dishes with vegetables or fruit were often known by the name of the
ingredient highlighted in them: isfanakhiyya was a spinach dish, tujfdhiyya an
apple dish. Vegetables frequently used included leeks, onions, turnip and cabbage, but also plants which today we would classify as herbs such as mint, rue, fresh coriander and thyme. Fruits used were fresh and dried. A common fresh fruit was the date, which was found in several hundred varieties; apricot, plum and quince featured as well. Dried fruits could mean
both soft fruit, such as pears and peaches, and nuts, such as almonds, pistachios and pine seeds. Plants classified as 'seeds' included chick peas and
lentils and the grasses wheat, barley and rice.

Dishes prepared with vegetables alone belonged to a category of cold (bawarid) side dishes to accompany others at the table, although they could

be made with meat, fowl or fish as well. Vinegar was a common ingredient,
and the resulting flavour of these dishes would range from sharp and piquant,
through sweet and sour with the addition of sugar or honey to a delicately
balanced taste by adding chopped almonds or oil. Vinegar in the medieval
Middle Eastern cuisine was genuine vin aigre (khaR khamf). It was the preserv
ing agent in dishes called mukhalla]dt, which referred to, among others, pickled
onions, capers, cucumber, turnip and eggplant. These were said to cleanse a

17 Anonymous, Kanz alfawa^dji tanwi' al mawa'id, ed. Manuela Marin and David Waines
(Beirut, 1993), p. 2.6.

760

Cookery

greasy palate and to assist digestion. Other pickle preparations were relishes or
condiments called kawamikh which required almost daily attention for six to
twelve weeks. They appear to have been served in several small bowls into
which bread or other morsels of food could be dipped. Another preparation
requiring many weeks' elaboration was muni, made from wheat and barley
and resembling in its bitter flavour the classical Roman fish based substance
garum or liquamen or the modern Vietnamese nuoc mam. It was used as one
seasoning among others in a wide variety of dishes. 1

The later Middle Ages, 803-1112/ 1400-1700

The above account has covered in some detail the culinary features shared
throughout the medieval Arab world as they appear in the extensive treasury
of recipes preserved in the cookbooks. The latest of these is most likely of
Egyptian provenance of the eighth/fourteenth or ninth/fifteenth century.
The manuals reflect values of Islamic societies in the sense that there are no
recipes explicitly for pork, prohibited by dietary law. Meat dishes found in the
cookbooks nonetheless belonged to all irrespective of religious faith by the
simple expedient of meat substitution, a Christian replacing mutton with pork
if desired. Also prohibited is wine, broadly defined. However, certain prepa
rations for beverages could produce a forbidden brew, the liquid fermenting
by remaining several weeks in its container in the sun. However, for pious
Muslims everywhere, alcohol, like pork, would be stricdy avoided.

The three centuries down to 1700 witnessed the further expansion of
Muslim rule, with the rise of the three great empires of the Ottoman Turks,
the Persian Safavids and the Mughals in India. So far as is known, extensive
primary evidence of the kind described in the foregoing sections is not extant
for these regions. True, there are, for example, the Turkish Arabic dictionary
of the fifth/ eleventh century compiled by Mahmud al Kashghari and a ninth/
fifteenth century Ottoman Turkish translation of Baghdad!' s work. Several
printed cookbooks in Turkish have been identified for the period between
1840 and 1930. I9 In Persian, two works describing Indian cookery of the
sultan's court belong to the tenth/ sixteenth and eleventh/ seventeenth cen
turies. 20 However, we shall approach these later centuries with broad brush
strokes only, leaving it to future research to fill in the detail.

18 See David Waines, "Mum: The tale of a condiment', al Qantara, 12, 2 (1991).

19 Turgut Kut, 'A bibliography of Turkish cookery books up to 1927', Petits Propos
Culinaires, 36 (1990).

20 See C. A. Storey, Persian literature, 2 vols. (Leiden, 1977), vol. II/3, p. 389.

761

First, the single overwhelming influence on culinary vocabulary and prac
tice throughout the Arab Islamic world and beyond was Persian. In Britain
today the names of many popular cooked products are recognisably Persian in
origin: kebab, biriani, nan, tikka. Pilaf (pilau, polow) is a three stage method of
cooking rice by washing/ soaking, boiling and steaming that ensures light, dry,
plump, separate grains. This was distinct from more traditional methods
which produced thicker kinds of rice porridge or pudding. Pilaf rice may
then be mixed with various ingredients from herbs, pulses, vegetables or fruits
to meat or poultry, grilled, stuffed or roasted. Plain white rice made in this
fashion is called chelow. The basic method is described in two medieval Arabic
cookbooks, and the more elaborate preparations, already widely used in
Persia, found their way into Turkish and Mughal cooking as well.

With the rise of the Ottoman power, first in Anatolia and then from the
capture of Constantinople in 857/1453, another fusion of cultural frontiers was
realised. One the one hand, the Turks inherited the culinary delights of the
Persians, Arabs and other peoples, as well as bringing certain of their own
traditional practices with them. As a result of cultural mixing there emerged in

the cosmopolitan capital's vast imperial kitchens of Topkapi an astonishing
number of specialists, such that by the tenth /sixteenth century there were
nearly 1,600 cooks at work providing subsidised food for as many as 10,000
people: an act of charity on a grandiose scale. The system was replicated, albeit
on a smaller scale, in cities and larger towns in the empire, as an extensive
network of social aid in the form of public soup kitchens for the benefit of
widows, orphans, the poor, the destitute and travellers. A parallel network
was founded in the Sufi zawiyas. On the other hand, one of the Turks' own
contribution to the culinary map was bulghur wheat or burghul, parboiled
wheat dried in the sun and then coarsely ground. Possessing a distinctive nutty
flavour, it was and is used in making pilaf, and mixed together with meat to
produce kiifte and kubba. This was an innovation equal to the Berber develop
ment of couscous. Another contribution is the stew known as giivef, popular
all over the Balkans and made in a vessel of the same name, a round or oval,
wide, shallow, glazed or unglazed casserole.

The Mughal empire was a Muslim enclave in a Hindu continent; no matter
how great the extent of Muslim rule, Muslims always constituted a minority
religious community within the total Indian population. Mughal cuisine might
refer, therefore, to the court culture of the emperors where the major
influence was once again the refined tastes and dishes of Persia. Yet certain
emperors, particularly Akbar (964 1014/ 1556 1605), owing to his policy of
religious syncretism, became influenced by Hindu customs, and he forswore

762

Cookery

beef and declared a number of days, called sufiyana days, in which he ate no
meat and slaughtering animals for meat was prohibited. Cooking and eating
habits among the populace under Mughal rule is a different matter and more
difficult to describe. The ordinary Muslims and Hindus were divided on the
question of meat. The Muslim had no problem with any meat other than pork.
The vegetarian Hindu might have found the Muslim's fondness for meat an
obstacle even to social intercourse, let alone to the prospect of conversion.
One Indian preparation that both communities could share was the spiced
sauce or paste called curry, readily adopted into Mughal cooking. Curry
(Tamil kari) employed a more complex spice spectrum than that used in the
Persian tradition. As a sauce prepared separately and then added to rice,
vegetables or meat and poultry, its function also differed from the Middle
Eastern traditions, where seasonings were added to the pot during cooking.
Left to themselves, peoples' food habits are conservative if not immutable.
Left to the forces of history, peoples' tastes change and are changed so that 'he
who sets out on the path of acceptance soon forgets how to refuse'. 21 This is a
fitting summation of over a millennium long series of culinary transforma
tions that accompanied the rise and spread of a new religious tradition.

21 Jean Anthelme Brillat Savarin, The philosopher in the kitchen (Harmondsworth, 1970
[1825]), p. 170.

Glossary

'Abbasids

adab
'ahd
ahl

akhbar

Almohads

Almoravids

amsar

l aql
Ash'arism

atabeg
Ayyubids

bab

major Islamic dynasty (132 656/750 1258), based in

Baghdad and, later, Cairo (659 923/1261 1517)

(pi. adab) manners; belles lettres

covenant

people: ahl al bayt, the Prophet's family; ahl al dhimma,
people with a contract of protection; ahl al kitab, People
of the Book; ahl al surma, (lit. 'the people of the surma',
SunnI Muslims

(sing, khabaf) traditions; stories, anecdotes: akhbar
history, literary history

(al Muwahhidun) Berber reformist dynasty (524 667/
1130 1269) based in North Africa and al Andalus

(al Murabitun) Berber dynasty (448 541/1056 1147) that
flourished in North Africa and al Andalus before being
overthrown by the Almohads

leader; military leader: amir al mu'mirdn, commander of
the faithful

(sing, misf) garrison cities established by the Muslim
conquerors in Iraq and elsewhere

reason, intellect

school of theology named after Abu '1 Hasan al Ash'ari,
which emphasised a rationalist defence of traditional
Islam and came to represent the mainstream of SunnI
theology

(also atabak) tutor to a young prince

dynasty of Kurdish origin which ruled Egypt (564 650/
1169 1252) before the Mamluks, and also had branches in
Damascus, Aleppo and elsewhere

(lit. 'gate') agent of the twelfth imam

764

Glossary

baraka
batin
bay'a
bayt

bid'a
Buyids

Companions
da%

dar

da'wa
dawla
devsirtne

dhikr

dhimma
dhimmi

din

dinar

dirham

dvwan

falsafa

fond'

faqih

Fatimids

blessing, spiritual power (of an individual holy man)

inward, esoteric (aspect of the divine revelation)

oath of allegiance, public proclamation of fealty

house, dwelling place: Bayt al Hikma, institution of

higher learning in Baghdad

innovation

Shi'ite dynasty of Daylamite origin that flourished in

Iran and Iraq (320 454/932 1062), and coexisted with the

'Abbasid caliphs in Baghdad

(sahaba) the Prophet's associates

missionary, preacher; in Isma'Hism da'i mutlaq {dcTi with

absolute authority)

realm, abode: dar al c adl, court of justice; dar al 'ahd,

territory governed by a treaty (with non Muslims); dar

al barb, (lit. 'the abode of war 1 , the non Muslim world);

dar al imara, government house; dar al islam, territories

brought by conquest under Muslim rule; dar al sulh,

territory governed by a truce (with non Muslims)

missionary movement

(Pers. dawlat) a change in power; state, government

levy of young males imposed on Christian villages in
the Ottoman empire

(lit. 'remembrance') 'recollection' of God; in Sufism,
ritualistic repetition of a prayer or formula

agreement of protection

non Muslim living in a Muslim country and guaranteed
security and freedom of worship in exchange for the
payment of tribute (jizya)

religion, faith

gold coin

silver coin

administrative bureau; collection of a poet's works

philosophy

(lit. 'annihilation') absorption of the self into the divine

(pi. fuqaha') jurist

Isma'Hi dynasty that flourished in North Africa (from
297/909) and Egypt (358 567/969 1171) until
overthrown by Saladin

765

Glossary

fatwa (pi. fatawa) legal opinion, issued by a legal scholar in

response to a question
fiqh (lit. 'understanding') Islamic jurisprudence, the

substantive law of the sharVa
ghayba the absence or occultation of an imam: al ghayba

al kubra, greater occultation; al ghayba al sughra, lesser

occultation
ghazal love poem

ghulam (pi. ghilman) lad; slave; slave soldier

ghulat, ghaliya (sing. ghalT) follower of extreme Shfite heterodox

doctrines such as the transmigration of souls and the

divinity of the imams
hadlth orally transmitted report of a saying of the Prophet and

his Companions; such reports in general
hajib chamberlain

hajj pilgrimage to Mecca

halqa (pi. halaqat) circle; study circle

hammam bathhouse, public bath

Hanafism one of the four main schools of law (madhhabs) of

Sunni Islam, named after Abu Hanifa, most popular in

Turkey, Central Asia and the Indian subcontinent
Hanbalism one of the four main schools of law (madhhabs) of

Sunni Islam, named after Ahmad ibn Hanbal, it is the

madhhab to which the founder of Wahhabism belonged
haqiqa (pi. haqaHq) hidden spiritual truth; reality

haqq truth, right, reality

hijra the Prophet's flight /emigration from Mecca to Medina;

the obligation to emigrate from countries dominated by

infidel or unjust rulers

hikma wisdom: hikmat i c amaU, practical philosophy; al hikma

al iWniyya (Pers. hikmat i ilahT), divine wisdom or

theosophy; al hikma al ishraqiyya, illuminationist

philosophy; al hikma al mashshd'iyya, Peripatetic philosophy

hiyal 'tricks' or legal devices to circumvent prohibitions such

as that on usury; artifice, fraud

hudiid (sing, hadd) punishments laid down by the Qur'an

ijaza a 'licence' to teach or transmit a particular text issued by

the master with whom one had studied; in Sufism, to

766

Glossary

ijma
ijtihad

ikhtilaf
Ikhwan al Safa 1

Him
imam

iqta'

islam

Isma'ilis

isnad

Ithna 'Asharis

jihad

jizya

kalam

karamat

katib
khalifa

instruct one's own disciples in accordance with the

master's spiritual 'method': ijazat al tadris wa'l ifta\ the

authorisation to teach law and issue legal opinions

consensus

independent reasoning: ijtihad al ra'y, the exertion of

mental energy for the sake of arriving, through

reasoning, at a considered opinion

difference of opinions among mujtahids

(Brethren of Purity) group of Isma'ili influenced

Neoplatonist philosophers and intellectuals that

compiled the Rasa'il, an encyclopaedia of all the sciences

in the form of fifty two epistles

(pi. Hilum) knowledge

Shi'ite spiritual and political leader; founder of a

madhhab; major scholar

prayer leader

land whose revenue is allocated to a soldier; fief

submission

also Seveners; members of a branch of Shi'ite Islam

emphasising an esoteric interpretation of the Qur'an,

influenced by Neoplatonism and with a belief in a

cyclical theory of history centred on the number seven

(pi. asanid) chain of transmitters

also Twelvers or Imamis; majority branch of the

Shi'ites, who acknowledge twelve imams after the death

of the Prophet, and believe that the twelfth imam went

into occultation and will return

(lit. 'struggle') holy war; also spiritual discipline

('greater jihad')

(Tur. jizye) poll tax paid by dhimmis living in Islamic lands

(lit. 'speech') scholastic theology, dialectic

miracles, special wonders performed by a saint through

divine grace

(pi. kuttab) scribe, secretary

(lit. 'successor' or 'deputy') caliph, leader of the Islamic

community: khalifat alldh, deputy of God; khalifat rasiil

Allah, deputy of the messenger of God; deputy of a Sufi

master

767

Glossary

khalwa

khanqah

Kharijites

khassa

khatib

khilafa/khilafat

khutba

kitab

kufr

kuttab

madhhab

madrasa

mahdi

majlis

Malikism

mamluk

Mamluks

ma l rifa

masjid

mathnawi

mawla

mazalim

mihna

mihrab

mi'raj

mufti

retreat, seclusion

Sufi convent

also Khawarij; members of an early schismatic

movement that rejected All and subsequent caliphs and

inspired numerous rebellions; often known as fanatical

(pi. khawass) elite; initiates; crown land; occult property

of an object

orator; one who delivers the sermon at the Friday

prayer

caliphate

Friday sermon

(pi. kutub) book

unbelief

elementary school

(pi. madhahib) school of law

religious college

(lit. 'the rightly guided one') expected messianic leader

(pi. majalis) meeting, assembly; music /literary salon

one of the four main schools of law (madhhabs) of
Sunni Islam, named after Malik ibn Anas

slave soldier

Egyptian dynasty (648 922/1250 1517) founded by
mamluks, who presided over a flowering of Egyptian art
and architecture until overthrown by the Ottomans

gnosis

(lit. 'place of prostration') mosque: masjid jami\
congregational mosque where the Friday prayer is
performed

(Urdu mathnavT) religious poem composed of rhyming
couplets

(pi. mawalT) relative; client; non Arab convert to Islam

(lit. 'wrongful acts') ruler's court where grievances
would be heard

inquisition; an attempt by the caliph al Ma'mun to
impose adherence to the doctrine of a created Qur] an

niche within a mosque indicating the qibla

heavenly journey of the Prophet

(in India mulavi) legal scholar qualified to deliver afatwa

768

Glossary

Mughals

mujtahid

muqarnas

murid

mutakallim

Mu'tazilism

nabi
nafs
nass
nisba

qadx

qa'im

qaniin

qasida
qibla

qiyas

rasul

ra'y

ribat

rihla

ruh

Safavids

salat
Saljuqs

Shafi c i

Islamic dynasty that flourished in India (932 1274/ 1526

1858) and presided over a cultural and artistic golden age

jurist, scholar entitled to deliver an independent

judgment

stalactite like architectural ornamentation

(pi. murxdun) Sufi novice / disciple

(pi. mutakaRimun) practitioner of kalam, dialectical

theologian

early theological school characterised by belief in

human free will and the createdness of the Qur] an

(pi. anbiya') prophet

the human soul or spirit; the body's sensual appetites

designation (of a successor)

final component of a personal name that identifies place

of birth, tribal affiliation, occupation etc.

judge

awaited messianic leader, mahdx

regulation, law; Ottoman state law: qanun name, law
code

multi thematic poem, ode

the direction (towards the Ka c ba) faced by worshippers
in prayer

analogy, analogical reasoning (in law)

messenger

reason; individual opinion (in law)

Sufi convent

journey, travelogue

soul, spirit: ruh al qudus, holy spirit

Persian dynasty (907 1145/ 1501 1732) that made Ithna
'Ashari Shfism the official branch of Islam in Iran

prayer

Turkish dynasty (429 590/1038 1194) that established
itself in Iran in the fifth/ eleventh century and extended
its rule westward to Iraq, Syria and Anatolia

(lit. 'listening') ritualised 'listening' to music and
mystical poetry; music

one of the four main schools of law (madhhabs) of
Sunni Islam, named after Muhammad ibn Idris al Shafi c i,

Glossary

shahada
sharTa
shaykh
shaykh al islam

Shi'ism

siyasa(t)
Sufism

sultan
surma

Sunnism

sura
tafsir
tanasukh
taqiyya

taqlid

ta'rikh

tarlqa

tarjama

tasawwuf

tawakkul

tawhid

Timurids

'ulama^

which became popular in Lower Egypt, Syria, East

Africa, southern Arabia and South East Asia

profession of faith

Islamic law

(pi. shuyiikh; f. shaykha) elder; spiritual master

(Tur. seyhiilislam) chief religious authority; head of the

^ulama'

branch of Islam that originated with the belief that

'All should have succeeded the Prophet as khalifa; the

majority of Muslims in Iran and Iraq are Shi c ites

(pi. siyaf) exemplary conduct of a ruler; biography of the

Prophet; heroic romance; stand alone single subject

biography

statecraft; Ottoman penal system; execution

Islamic mysticism; there are many Sufi orders all over

the Muslim world, with a variety of beliefs and practices

authority, sovereignty; government; ruler

(pi. sunan) exemplary mode of conduct; the practice of

Muhammad and his Companions

branch of Islam adhered to by the majority of Muslims

in most non Shi'ite countries

chapter of the Qur'an

Qur'anic exegesis

transmigration of souls (metempsychosis)

precautionary dissimulation of one's true religious

belief and practice

(lit. 'imitation') dependence on the views of earlier legal

authorities

chronologically dated history

(pi. turuq) Sufi order; mystical way or path

(pi. tarajim; lit. entry) biographical entry; biography

Sufism; the wearing of a woollen robe

complete trust in, and total reliance on, God

divine unity

Turco Mongol dynasty founded by Timur Lang in the

late eighth/fourteenth century which ruled Iran and

Central Asia and presided over a flowering of culture

religious scholars

770

Glossary

Umayyads

umma
usul

wahdat al wujud
wajib

walaya

wall

waqf

wildya
wujud
zahir

zakat

zawiya

Zaydis

first major Islamic dynasty (41 132/661 750), established

after the death of 'All, which ruled until the Abbasid

revolution; a branch of the family also ruled in

al Andalus (138 422/756 1031)

community (of believers); nation

foundations, principles: usul al dm, principles of

theology; usul alfiqh, foundations /principles of

jurisprudence

doctrine of the 'oneness of being'

that which is obligatory under Islamic law; necessary:

wajib al wujud, 'necessary existent'

friendship with God; sainthood

(pi. awtiya') saint; authority: wall Allah, friend of God

(pi. awqaf) pious foundation; endowment, charitable

trust

authority

existence

outward, manifest, exoteric (aspect of the divine

revelation)

alms tax

Sufi convent

branch of Shi'ism, following imams of Alid descent,

based mainly in northern Iran and Yemen, characterised

by Mu'tazilite beliefs and a willingness to participate in

armed rebellions

771

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780

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813

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843

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